

# Three Memoires:

Daybook

Nightbook

A Domesday Book



Gardner Rich

Ark Press

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# DAYBOOK



a journal of some kind

My mother's mother was called "Nana" and she was a sentimental, big-hearted, give-you-the-shirt-off-her-back person with a quirky generosity and fiery temper. To prove the latter point, she dyed her brown hair red. One morning I was at her house in Lawndale, sitting at the chrome kitchen table when she decided it was time for me to write a nice letter to her father who was somewhere in Colorado at the time. Grandpa Mae was a tall, gray, resolute man who wore a Stetson and kept two high-strung Chihuahuas, one of which was named Honey Jo, and the other I cannot remember. Actually, Honey Jo was his, and the other belonged to my great-grandmother, who would soon die, thus sending Grandpa to So Cal to live his remaining years with Nana.

Nana wanted me to write a newsy letter. I wanted to write something else, but she was Nana and I adored her, and so, on three pages pulled carefully from her clean linen writing tablet, the kind that comes with a ruled page for placement under the page being written, I reported all the news I could gather. I wrote thoughtfully and carefully, checking my spelling, and when I was finished I handed the letter to Nana, who said she wanted to make sure it was all right.

She read the letter, smiled broadly, and congratulated me on a fine effort. But before the buttons could pop off my chest – Nana's description for being pleased as Punch – she said that the letter was too perfect and needed a mistake or two, perhaps three, so that Grandpa would not think that I was showing off. Mistakes, said Nana, were cute, and Grandpa would enjoy reading such a letter. So, she took it upon herself to make the necessary changes – an error in grammar here, a mistake in spelling there.

I really cannot describe the complex emotions I felt when she did this to my letter. It was being made to feel guilty for doing something well. It was being told to hide one's small light under a basket. I was not even permitted to feel angry, much less to express anger, because she was Nana.

This was so many years ago, when I was a boy and too young to know that her redaction was done with the best intentions, not from the politics of a committee or council. Yet when I consider the man I have become, I often wonder whether this little episode was the beginning of my antipathy toward editors, certainly, but perhaps also toward authority in general. I wonder also if it is the reason I have episodically yet doggedly pursued writing, when at bottom I am not a writer at all. Such are the things that shape us. And such is the preamble to this MS., when, to be truthful, I had earlier decided to use the following line as an epigraph:

"For this book is the talking voice that runs on..."  
Stevie Smith, *Novel on Yellow Paper*

You may be thinking, then what's all this scribbling? It is a voice certainly, but it is a written voice and cannot be otherwise. One supposes such an assertion would give Ms. Smith cause to lump this writer with all her other "smug-pugs" as *a foot-on-the-ground person*. She means to say trite or unimaginative, commonplace and boring.

O sticks and stones. Anyway, this time I am writing to you, and this is my written voice. It means that I am here, or at least was once here, while writing this sentence. And you, as the reader, are right now somewhere, so it occurs to me that I might be envious of you for that – if only I could feel envy, should I happen not any longer to be feeling anything, anywhere. But never mind – we both know better than to give this circular nonsense more time, when time is running out. Or, perhaps more accurately, in short supply.

The problem for me just now is that all the old dodges no longer avail -- not walks, books, music, or indiscriminate couplings. Painting might help, but just now I have no brushes and no paint. But no matter, for I also have no ideas. In turn, this means I have to put off my next novel. No ideas, you see. This fact, in a curious way, returns us to what you are reading now -- a last grab at 'the immortality that is words upon paper'. Ha.

Yup, A is for angst. B is the blahs and blues. Corry (soft C), nothing for C. D is for down in the dumps with the dark hound. How many idioms are there for depression? I do not take Prozac or any other prescribed medication; I just deal with it. (You are smiling, aren't you. That's fine, but as we are only just now getting acquainted, I will ask you to save outright laughter for later. Besides, I said "with it" not "in it." That changes considerably the meaning of 'it'.)

I know one usually assumes -- hopes, anyway -- that books are repositories of whatever is best and bright. Corry. I hate to disappoint, although this is not the same as saying that I would strive to please. I will make a request, nonetheless. Given this is not the first book without an idea, please be patient and tolerant and stay the course a while. You are absolutely necessary. There is no point in writing, painting, composing, or cooking just for oneself. Many disagree with this assertion, but they are wrong. "I just paint to please myself. I don't care what others think." Nonsense.

I am writing to you now in the hope of keeping my head on straight. Fear not, gentle reader. I, too, dislike tedious company, so this will be no contribution to the confessional literature of the world. It will be no more honest than any other book that pretends to honesty. It will not fail, then, to reflect my view of the world, however skewed. (Isn't syntax wonderful? We could found a new sect on just such an ambiguity. Whether the world or my view of it is skewed is yours to determine -- and you are welcome.)

Keeping one's head on straight is not always easy, especially here. By and by, I will let you figure out where is "here." Actually, you would figure it out whether I made it explicit or not. This is because you, like all my readers, are ideal. How does it feel to be regarded as a paragon? You ideal reader, you. Takes your breath away, doesn't it.

By now you have rightly guessed that I am not enamored of my fellows. This is not to say that I am careless or indifferent. In my own defense, I would say that I care a good deal; a more than adequate amount; an ample share; enough to fill a basket or two after all the caring is even-handedly dispensed. (Attention Freudians: please note literary allusions.) Still, I am driven by self-interest. I am living proof that we humans have little to recommend us. No, no, no -- don't raise your eyebrow. Here, there will be no fear and loathing. This is not Las Vegas, this is "Oh-Well Ville." And this association could lead to Orville (right? See, you do it, too) or to George Orwell.... Oh, well.... Someone recently told me that wordplay is a sign of oncoming psychosis. I like to think that it prefigures my election as Prince of Denmark, so, if such play is the thing, then perhaps I am in an early stage.

All the world's a dog and pony show. We have our pratfalls and pies in the face, and each turd in his time breaks many farts. All right, I'll quit. I know this isn't how you like it. Besides, I really feel the world's rather more like a stage's trapdoor, and I'm starting to feel better already, now I've demonstrated how clever I am.

Are you with me? The real question is, then, if I am so clever, why am I here? A friend sent me a birthday greeting that said "another year older and going nowhere; so much for the good news." Great guy. Still, he is right. I am going nowhere. Here, in my profession, the only requisite is a pulse. Let me explain.

My profession is lunacy. It is entertainment disguised as higher education. Basically my job is to load the next cattle car of TOEFL/TOEIC test-takers. What a racket. If I could just find a way to move from the service department into middle management, I'd be better adjusted, have a more positive attitude, and be free finally of the Past and Present Simple. All that.

Actually, the administrators here are not stupid. They are pragmatic. The government mandates that all college students shall have a minimal two years' study of my mother tongue. Aptitude and interest have no consideration here. The administrators know that few students will ever use a syllable of English, that it is quite irrelevant to their daily lives, and so they pack fifty students into a once-a-week three-hour session to practice conversational English. Do the math, as people say back home, and you will understand the meaning of 'individualized attention'. Yes, I suppose I should be thankful, for it is guaranteed employment.

Perhaps this is not the real root of my discontent, because here I have taught many subjects other than conversational English. I have taught persuasive writing, reading, literature, general psychology, government, sociology, mass media, comparative civilization, and Thai history. (Now you know where I am.) If I include subjects taught back in Colorado, there is also logic, drawing, art history, and literature and theory. These have made me a utility infielder in the humanities and social sciences which, on its face, is anything but boring. However, it is superficial, and that is the problem. I expect more from myself and others than students here can deliver. To encapsulate: Cogito Ergo Sum in the Land of No-Thought. Not only would this be a snappy title atop best-seller lists, just now it could be the proximate cause of why my wheels are spinning so loosely. My late friend, John Sorbie, would have called it "circling on station."

I am circling and waiting, and that is difficult, because a birthday has turned me fifty-two. I am waiting for the Thai Ministry of Education to grant approval for my old school to open a new fine arts curriculum. If approved, I will leave the Rajabhat Institute (formerly the Teachers' College) to teach painting at Yonok College, which, I am told, will become a full university sometime later this year. Yonok has recently added faculties of engineering and law, and many are anticipating the new fine arts program. Yonok is where I have done most of my teaching in Thailand.

I left Yonok for the last time in March 2000. I had had enough. I stayed in Thailand until August (or was it late July?) to finish a novella, then returned to Colorado to teach and to paint. The teaching posts fell through when I refused to sign a new loyalty oath. This was a shame, because I had an opportunity to teach both humanities and ethics, my real subjects. (Yes, I appreciate the irony of being barred from teaching ethics for reason of conscience. Beyond that, I also think loyalty oaths are unconstitutional. I do not propose to demonstrate why.) I was hoping that teaching would support my long habit of painting, which was formerly my profession. I quit in 1985, in favor of studying legal research and writing, which I did for a time as a state district court law clerk. That's four nouns used as adjectives, and another life ago. The point is, I was painting again to support myself, and waiting for the day when Janjira, my wife, would join me.

Actually, I never really stopped painting professionally. Since 1985, I have painted five museum murals and a number of commissions. The difference is, there were protracted periods of not painting, because I was here. Over the years, I have noticed that I paint when in Colorado, I write when in Lampang. This is roughly accurate.

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The stars (asterisks) above indicate that I was interrupted. Later, they may signify I was disrupted or simply ran out of gas. No doubt they'll be useful. Actually, this time I went to hospital in connection with my father-in-law, who recently had surgery.

I hate interruptions. As an ideal reader, you have no idea (theoretically) what interruption means. So please let me explain the obvious. Interruption makes concentration difficult, because the idea one would convey gets lost in the

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Where were we? Doesn't matter. I want to talk about my failure as a painter. It is only in the past several days that I have seen myself as a complete failure. Perhaps others, too, have long regarded me in this light. What triggers my general disappointment is the cancellation of funding to publish the first book I wrote here. Next up will be the contract to publish itself. The economy is down, prospects are bleak, and my little book is unlikely to do much.

Now, you must excuse me. Janjira has just called me to table for sukiyaki. If you were here, you could join us. She made enough for four, and it's just the two of us.

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Too many interruptions, so our topic is now the mental effort it takes to live here -- an amount either prodigious or appalling, depending upon your point of view. Much of the tension comes from maintaining a placid surface while everything around one is a tumult. It takes great energy to do the simplest things. By and by, examples are sure to follow.

My natural sense of irony has been honed by two things, deconstruction and living here. Thailand is ostensibly Buddhist, and Buddhism shares with deconstruction a certain irreverence for the dialectician. It seems to me that Buddhism and deconstruction are Sophistic if not exactly pre-Socratic. Distinctions and demarcations are not always clean and sharp. Aristotle would go nuts here. Want a hypothetical proof? My taxonomies are less exacting than Ari's, and I'm going nuts. Does that follow? Who cares. Here, it follows that if  $a = b$  and  $b = c$ , then perhaps  $a = c$ . On the other hand, Aristotle might think that a challenge. I did, once upon a time. Now I find it exasperating, because of the psychic energy it takes to do the simplest things. Not that again, you must be thinking. Well, welcome to circularity. More charitably, you could call it the "holistic" view. Notice too, that I changed terms from "mental" to "psychic." Are you thinking that I am inconsistent and have failed to maintain a distinction? Tsk, tsk. This is Thailand.

Someone's at the gate.

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Most of the world's languages, including Thai, have 30,000 to 60,000 words. English, according to Oxford's last count, has perhaps 600,000 words. You are thinking this includes archaisms, loan-words, and technical jargon. Yes, it does -- but this also is true of the world's other languages. As an American, I use an average daily vocabulary of 300 words. Intelligent dogs, according to those who purport to know, understand perhaps 200 to 300 words. I mention this because I want to be fair in saying that the Thai language, and the thought it produces, are qualitatively different from what is sometimes produced in English. (Never mind the "dumbing down" of English through advertising and

popular culture.) This becomes clear if one watches, say, "Shakespeare in Love" with Thai subtitles. Of course, differences in culture partly explain the poverty of the translation -- certain allusions are culturally bound, and another language, any language, simply can't carry the load. This is a truism. But I have noticed in the translation of my own writing into Thai, that subtleties are lost, specifics become generalized, and the import is often different -- a mood or tone cannot be conveyed. When I tell writing students there are dozens if not hundreds of ways to say something in English, they are befuddled. When I tell them there is no formula and they are free to find a way, they are paralyzed. A chance for self-expression often produces fifty similar papers, if a teacher is lucky. Otherwise, the papers will be verbatim copies. I have taken to providing different examples written around a single topic. In return, I receive single paragraphs of sentences copied from the different examples. Sometimes these paragraphs are strung together in logical order -- more often, not. Why not, I aforesometimes asked. The answer brings us back to...

Guess what? Time to go again.

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Janjira's father was returned to the hospital last night. It is more serious this time, perhaps cancer of the colon. We should know in a couple days, after the barium enema -- such an elegant term, rhythmic and sonorous, for such an inelegant practice. Life is full of these little ironies and packed with paradox. Over the years, I have acquired an eye for irony, even a taste that is so palpable you could touch it, if your ears were not offended by the smell of a mixed metaphor.

I am being silly because that is one of several defenses I employ against such unpleasant thoughts as cancer. This time it could be serious, and Janjira is upset. The truth is, she takes care of her father without speaking to him. This is so for the entire family. No one speaks to him unless he speaks first, and replies are truncated. There is a history here, one that turns on his returning home to convalesce from a stroke, after perhaps fifteen years of living with a minor wife. Here, the door is always open to prodigals. You might think that I would fit in better, but no.

Janjira times his pulse, draws his blood, checks its pressure, administers his medication, books his appointments, drives him to clinics, bunks near his berth at the hospital where she stayed last night. Her vacations are spent caring for aged parents. I try to help here and there, especially when she is crying. That she should talk to her father is my most recent suggestion. It matters not whether he is a good man; because he is her father, she needs to speak with him. Wiping his fanny is a lot, but it is not enough.

There's so much water under the bridge. Years ago, before he departed to stay with his minor wife, Janjira's father decided to remodel the house. This left the family heavily in debt, and it was Janjira who paid for the renovation. The new debt was a present waiting for her upon graduation. It took ten years to repay. I went with her to the lending institution, when she made the last payment before we were married. Her face was absolutely calm, but her hand was shaking when she handed over the final payment. Free at last. Anyway, it is clear to me that she loves this man to whom she never speaks, and it will be hard for her when he dies if first they do not set things right.

This is the primary reason I know I must be here now. Had Janjira come to Colorado last autumn, she would have returned here now, to care for her father in this protracted illness. We would have remained apart for another indeterminate period.

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18 January. My grandfather's birthday. In other news, test results came back this afternoon. Janjira's father has cancer of the colon. Surgery is on Monday. The prognosis, as they say, is favorable from the standpoint the cancer has apparently not yet metastasized. In still other news, I was able to renew my visa until 18 September -- and it only took two trips to Immigration in Chiangmai, today, to pull it off. Monday, after teaching, I must visit the Sala Glang in regard to extending my work permit. It should be an interesting day.

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21 January. Have been busy these past few days. Janjira has called from surgery, underway now. Cancer has spread to a lymph node. I will go to the hospital in a little. Besides her father being ill, on Saturday we received word that a cousin in Chiangmai had a breast removed and is now taking chemotherapy. Yesterday, which was Sunday, Janjira's sister-in-law was admitted to hospital with a collapsed lung. Consequently, the family is dividing time between the fifth and sixth floors. I am here, at home, waiting for the telephone to ring.

We were speaking about my failure as an artist. It must be several days since I began writing about this little chestnut. For you, it's only a page or two ago, so from your standpoint the disjunction may not be so acute as for me. But, to continue....

I love painting but dislike art. Anyone might enjoy applying paint to a surface, and that's painting, of course. Art, however, is another matter. First, I think it is foolish to define art; so, second, what I mean by that word will simply have to unfold. You, as an ideal reader, will know exactly what is meant and agree completely. Thanks.

I stopped reading magazines devoted to art in 1982, twenty years ago. By that time, most had become a weird hybridization of the trade publication and the vanity press. It was off-putting -- each gallery season's breakthrough of the decade, the dizzying speculation and exorbitant sums spent in the manufacture of "art stars," the hegemony of theory. Many have since complained of this, even those who were beneficiaries. (Does the name Julian Schnabel ring a bell? His movie *Basquiat* wants it both ways.) Anyway, it's a long list of grievances.

In my time, notions about art have been largely informed by an unstated Darwinian paradigm; hence, the notion of progress in the arts. This idea is widespread, because it is institutionalized. It is the *sine qua non* of the History of Art. The end-all of this enterprise has been a coherent, positivist narration of a particular field of human endeavor, spoon-fed to vast numbers of university students, myself included. Impressionism leads to neo-Impressionism or postimpressionism, which leads to.... on and on, each stylistic advance building upon previous advances, to an ever-higher form or state or stage or mutation. By now you, gentle reader, will have surmised that I think the enterprise is a magic lantern show. The view of art history as a theory of mutation is plausible only if one will ignore the Pre-Raphaelites, or the veiled religious imagery of Kandinsky's early "nonobjectives," or any number of other anomalies. The tool for maintaining this narrative is marginalization.

For most of my life, the margin has been anywhere outside New York City. Says who? The people of Le Beau Monde Manhattan. That New York City has been the dominating center since the Second World War cannot be denied. Still, there is a peculiar lens through which those in the center assess the margin, the provinces; and that assessment, it seems to me, is provincial. I should try to explain. The margin may not be

so provincial as the center is pleased to suppose. We might begin by pointing out that the center gets its talent from the outside, whether Cody, Wyoming or Port Arthur, Texas or Longmont, Colorado. Most of the work on the walls of the city's museums was not produced by people from the city.

The tendency in Manhattan is to view work done outside the city as either uninformed or derivative and passe. Usually it is the latter, which makes it easy to dismiss the margin for being marginal. The illusion that artists in the provinces do not know what is happening in the center is just that, an illusion. Few if any in Le Beau Monde will allow that artists in the provinces have different concerns or simply may have turned their backs to the art establishment. To that extent, two cheers for Santa Fe, which mostly gives not a hang what happens south of Houston Street.

Telephone from Janjira. Off to hospital.

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It's 3.00 AM and I am up and about. Went to bed too early last night, after a long day of mostly waiting. The surgery took five hours. Janjira's father is now in the intensive care unit.

As it happens, the cancer spread after all. Initially, the doctors thought not. Yesterday they removed some of the lymph nodes. Janjira was the anesthetist during the operation, and she did not crack until she got home to take a shower. She's still sleeping and grinding her teeth.

Otherwise things are all right here. I just extended the visa until September, and now it is the work permit, which I can collect on Friday, when I have to pay a stiff fee, one thousand baht, for permission to continue working. Taxes on income are after that. Oh, to be home.

My brother, Glen, sent news about Colorado's economy. It does not sound good. I know that an old friend, Binh Rybacki, was laid off recently, after 23 years with Hewlett-Packard and then Agilent. Binh and her husband, Jack, run orphanages in Vietnam. They have 2,300 mouths or more to feed every day. Much of the money for this has come from Binh's salary. But these matters pale by comparison with the matter under discussion. ART, you will recall.

At university I was taught by an abstract expressionist during the aftermath of Pop, when Op had passed and Minimalism and Conceptualism were underway. In France, Derrida was just publishing *Of Grammatology* and speaking at Johns Hopkins University. Postmodernism would follow in a couple years, beginning with architecture, then moving into literary studies and the visual arts. As I recall, that's roughly the chronological order.

The point is, I was postmodernist before the term was coined. It was not theoretical, it was intuitive. If one would be dismissive, my earliest painting was pastiche - the derogatory term so often applied to anything postmodern.

This orderly overview gives no hint of the confusion I felt as a student of painting in a newly mass-mediated culture. I am from the first generation raised with television. At the same time, I grew up with the printed page. This seems to mean that I was reared during a period of transition into the global, digital present. Frankly, from the get-go, painting seemed irrelevant or, at best, vestigial; a buggy-whip in an age of horse-less carriages. But this, too, is hindsight. In the teen-years, most of my thoughts were inchoate and inarticulate. I felt the way, rather than thought the way, through the maze.

And what a maze it was. For instance, in high school, after being uprooted from Redondo Beach, California to be re-potted in Loveland, Colorado, I played flugelhorn in

the band, painted oils in the art classes, and ran slants on the gridiron. At that time, one did not cross these lines. The bandmaster, the art instructor, and the football coach all tried to get me to specialize -- that is, to choose one and leave the other two activities behind. These were mutually exclusive, somehow.

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While rummaging through papers in a box, I came across a printout Janjira made from an attachment to e-mail. I was working on a series of paintings, the Forger's Suite, for almost three months before leaving Colorado. The attachment was an explanation of the suite, pieced together from e-mails sent to others. Reading it now, the original playfulness seems barely to conceal real testiness that I do not remember feeling at the time. You decide. Here 'tis:

What is the point? I will begin by saying that my reasons for undertaking The Forger's Suite are several. There is my love for painting, my skepticism of the art world's machinery, my interest in postmodernist theory (deconstruction in particular), and my question about the nature of genius. And there are my questions regarding mimesis, whether replication, quotation, appropriation, or fraud. There is, finally, the evaluative tension between what is original and what is not; between what is inspired and what is not; how these two are distinguished and the canon thereby formed. These are explicit. A careful reader will also find some others that are implicit (he wrote explicitly).

The above questions come to a point when one considers forgery.<sup>1</sup> To cite an anonymous critic, quoting myself in a recent issue of ART REVUE (May-July 2001), under the head Background & Discussion: "[Gardner] views forgery as a form of deconstruction that raises questions about originality. A genius, says Gardner, is supposed to be in possession of something the rest of us lack. For starters, a work of genius is inspired. Forgery, however, may not be inspired, yet it is taken for genius until shown to be otherwise." Well, there it is. In a nutshell.<sup>2</sup>

The case of Han van Meegeren is paradigmatically instructive. He was charged with alienating Dutch masterpieces when he sold a Vermeer to Hermann Goering. In fact, it was not just any old painting by Vermeer, but the greatest of all Vermeers according to Breedius, the expert's expert. To acquire the great painting, Goering agreed to return some 200 Dutch works stolen by the Nazis. When faced with a felony conviction, Van Meegeren defended himself by admitting to forgery. He had not, after all, alienated a Dutch national treasure; rather, he had perpetuated a fraud. None believed him, until he (re)produced a Vermeer in open court. Once the fraud was manifest, the experts, who previously had got into line behind Breedius, suddenly found many problems with the "greatest of all Vermeers." Suddenly, anyone could see it was a fake. This is not to suggest, as some have argued, that expert opinion always and everywhere entails bluff. This is not my meaning. But I digress...

In 1999, I saw a film entitled *Incognito*, about a fictional forger named Harry Donovan. The movie was entertaining, but it also made me retrace lines of inquiry informing Hokusai's Great Wave, Annotated (part of an MA project entitled TEXTUAL MATTERS). In the end, I began to think about forging the forgers -- namely, doing a series of paintings that openly replicated the forgers' techniques of replication.<sup>3</sup> But I am unable to locate Eric Hebborn's *The Forger's Handbook*, and the only methods with which I am familiar are those of Donovan and Van Meegeren. I cannot locate the practices of Stein, or Blundell, or De Hory, or Keating. But this does not work too great a difficulty

because, as with any maze, there is more than one entrance. All that was needed is another way to think about The Forger's Suite. Here, I must thank Rene Magritte.

*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Of course it's not a pipe, it's a mimicry. It's a reproduction of sorts, as is *LHOOQ*. This led to *Ceci n'est pas une Duchamp*, a manipulated digital image (an appropriation rather than a readymade, although the demarcation may not be quite so precise). Then comes "Signed 1/1" -- a sideswipe at "*giclee*" that for me functions on several levels. First, it is a low-grade reproduction of a self-portrait from 1999 (a first study for the Suite), an oil on canvas that was digitally photographed and then destroyed. The painting is now stored in the vaults of the Larimer County Landfill. All that remains is the digital image, which was printed onto canvas and appropriated by my former student, Winter Alexander, who scrubbed in some reddish brown in the upper left and signed the back. So, *Ceci n'est pas une Gardner*. Of course, in the days of Rembrandt, the teacher often appropriated the work of students. Turn-about seems fair play.

Also in my series are *Ceci n'est pas une Blundell* (after Monet); *Ceci n'est pas une Stein* (after Picasso); *Ceci n'est pas une Keating* (after Modigliani)...and others as time permits. Are any of these original? Now there's a poser -- or a poseur, if one prefers. *Ceci n'est pas une Donovan* (after Rembrandt). *Incognito* has it that "Every one is an original, but they are all fakes." Of course, intentionality may play a role. With The Forger's Suite, no one is trying to pass off anything as being anything other than what it is.

Is style a determining factor? I can speak only for myself. I did not grow up in a village in 17th century Holland. There was no local style, with Italian influences. Rather, my first loves were Kandinsky, French Impressionism, and the Blue Period. I was taught style in art history classes, and gestural painting in the university studios -- all during the reign of Pop and the minimalist ascendancy. So the influences are many, and I decided years ago to work out a synthesis, however far afield. To my mind, The Forger's Suite is another manifestation of long-standing concerns. Perhaps an analogy may be made with the music of Aaron Copland, if one compares passages from "Rodeo" with "Connotations." By turns they are readily accessible or forbidding, harmonic or dissonant, exuberant or introspective. But it's all Copland, who has more than one side. What makes "Rodeo" different from "Connotations," I think, is not differences in "style" so much as ratio.

Finally, who is the "audience"? Clearly, for The Forger's Suite, it is a small one -- probably confined to critics, curators, and art historians -- anyone with the requisite background. Elitist, what? Apologies to all. But I also paint portraits and landscapes and anything else that captures my attention or imagination. -- sometimes all on the same canvas. If this is not pure enough, or violates notions of seriousness, so be it. To work otherwise would be to deny my roots.

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#### Notes

1. For those inclined to further reading, see: Sandor Radnoti, *"The Fake: Forgery and Its Place in Art"* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 1999); Ervin Dunai, translator.

2. For a genuine postmodernist, all art constitutes fake or mask, in the Aristotelian sense of an imitation or counterfeit of something else. Or, if one prefers the view of Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedrus*: there is the ideal bed, the bed made by the carpenter, and the bed rendered by the artist. (See Paradia Syntagmalova, "A New Historicist Perspective" (of Hokusai's Great Wave, Annotated) in Textual Matters, page 102, note 1.)

3. This consideration follows a short series of works from the early 1980s, which dealt with the relation between photography and painting, and also from the *Three Ages of Woman*, a "sign system" composed of art historical references and styles, from 1984.

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[From a related note to poet Melissa Katsimpalis:]

Excerpt from Sandor Radnoti, "The Fake: Forgery and its Place in Art":

"It is not Michelangelo's originality that puts him ahead in the game against the classical artists, but his ability to mimic... Michelangelo's individual invention is simply equated with his ability to produce a free imitation of a classical work, not a straight reproduction that can even pass as an antique piece" (pps 3, 4).

The context for this passage includes Vasari's estimation of Michelangelo's gifts, together with the historical fact that Michelangelo produced pieces (dug up and discovered after being planted) that were passed off as antique -- what we would today consider "forgeries."

Further, the Renaissance view of what constitutes originality and genius differs from the current view. We tend to think in terms of "ground-breaking stylistic change" -- thanks in part to the Romantic notion of the "genius," but also to modern movements in the plastic arts. Our view is tied to the Darwinian paradigm of mutation and adaptation, of evolutionary change. Hence the value we place upon the "development" of an artist -- advancements in style, or the achievement of a higher synthesis, or an outright breakthrough -- now the *sine qua non* for being "serious."

[And this bit is from a note to painter Hugo Anderson:]

When you returned here yesterday after lunch, you asked my definition of "fraud." I replied in the usual way -- namely, that fraud involves the intention to deceive. You then said that any painting that is about forgery must then closely approximate the style of the artist who is the subject of the fraud. This is reasonable generally and, on its face, would seem to apply to my series. Admittedly, it does, to a degree. That is, the paintings must be recognizable in terms of the style or subject of another.

I think it is time for me to open up a little. My series is not about forgery at all. However, thinking about forgery is one point of entry -- and, it was by considering the implications of forgery, among other things, that set me going on the series, which is actually about my many influences and the way I paint. In a sense, they are paintings about my painting. (Here, I would recall to you a letter you once wrote to *Art in SoHo*, asking the editor where you could buy the brushes-brushes to do the "paintings-paintings" reviewed in that month's issue. You can see, I have not forgot that riposte to postmodernism.)

When we discussed appropriation, you said that the appropriation must be made personal to the appropriator -- adapted, transformed -- or other words to that effect. Warhol was your example. Of course, I agree, because I subscribe to that value. What I am wondering is, where is the line?

"*Ceci n'est pas une Magritte.*" Simple-minded, right? I just changed the caption under the pipe. But, to my mind this is an appropriation of Duchamp's idea of the ready-made, whereas "*Ceci n'est pas une Duchamp*" is not. Why? The latter is a manipulated image that quotes the scribbled moustache on Mona's face in "*LHOOQ.*"

The line from *Incognito* is something like "They are all quite original, but they are all fakes." The paintings in my series are not even fakes of forgeries. They tell you as much, right on the surface. The compositions are mine, including the "Balthus" and the "Gauguin," both of which were adapted from their works. Are these like Manet borrowing a pose for his "Olympia"?

It seems to me that ratio is everything. (And, in more than one sense.) If I had borrowed and adapted for a single work, there would be only a question of influence. But if I borrow and adapt one painting after another, then I am not merely "influenced." I slide down the evaluative scale past one who is "derivative" to hit bottom as one who is parasitical.

Corot was approached once by a collector who wanted to know whether his most recent acquisition was, in fact, a "Corot." When Corot said no, that he had not painted the picture in question, the collector threatened to sue the seller. Corot replied the seller had a wife and family, and there was no reason to ruin him. He took the painting, put in a brush stroke or two, and signed it. "Now," he said. "You have a Corot." Of course, this is not precisely in point with my argument, and it remains peripheral to my project. My project entails concepts of originality, quotation, appropriation, copying, etc. All the painters in the series are among the many who have influenced me. And I am asking what that means.

[Finally, this was to attorney Howard Goldman:]

Read your e-mail a couple days ago, and I have been thinking about what you wrote: "You and I, we have such talent, such potential. We just never seem to do the right thing at the right time. We seem to be out of sync with the cosmic forces of nature." It made me wish I could smile. I think it's too late to have potential. And, in my case, the lack of synchronization (success?) makes me wonder whether "my talent" is mostly illusory. The adage, of course, is that "cream rises."

You are right -- I am surely out of sync. Apparently I think differently from others. Certainly I hear this often enough. Perhaps some would take comfort in supposing there is a price to be paid for being of a different mind than the prevailing zeitgeist. However, it occurs to me that this condition is also one definition of insanity. (Are you wearing your Cleveland Indians cap as you read this?)

A recent example: the "forger's suite," which I left behind in Colorado. After talking with people whose specialty is fine art, it became apparent they did not understand the project. I'm not sure -- either they did not have sufficient grounding in postmodernist theory, or the suite's underlying critique was contrary to the usual assumptions. To me it was simple: one need only adopt the valuations of the Renaissance (which, of course, are different from the present).

I think Miles Davis did something similar in "Kind of Blue," a jazz classic that took a big step forward by going backwards -- i.e., by using medieval modal structure. What made it modern was the context. In *The Forger's Suite*, the context is also modern -- which is why "*Ceci n'est pas...*" is the key. It deals with questions in aesthetics -- influences, forging, copying, quoting, appropriating, and whatever separates these when it comes to evaluating what is "original" and what is not. But for some this may be too much to absorb.

Well, I am writing this to explain myself to myself. Lately, I have been thinking that my entire output for 25 years has been an exercise in futility. At best, a series of sputtering starts. As the days grow shorter, the waste of time and resources becomes increasingly appalling. With age, one's options close down. So here I am back in Lampang, where I do not want to be except for one good thing -- the fact Janjira is here.

Most important, that. Otherwise, there is the gaping realization that I have hit bottom with a "teaching job" that anyone could do, instructing tourism students to say "Hello, my name is Daeng," with proper "body language." Amazing nonsense, really. Apparently I have risen to my level of incompetence, if the Peter Principle still holds.

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Janjira's father is doing better today. The tube through his nose and into his stomach has been removed. This afternoon, we will try to help him walk.

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Couldn't get him to walk, so there were the usual soiled sheets. It must be humiliating for him. Such an array of needles, shunts, tubes, respirators, IV stands, bed pans, etc., and the efforts to which we go. I have been looking out the fifth-floor window, from which, in the near distance, the roof of the wooden viharna at Monpuyak Monastery is just visible over the dry treetops, and thinking of the concrete below. I recall Eliot calling it "dry thoughts in a dry season."

The physician wants him to undergo a course of chemotherapy. We have discussed this, and Janjira conceded to tell her father the decision is his own. He nodded. But enough of this.

We were discussing art, and I was tending to an admission of failure. The truth is, I can no longer tell whether I want to be understood or excused. I hope it is still the former, which might then explain why I was moved to write the preceding circumspect expositions of my most recent work. Yes, it was incomprehension. It was the same motor that drove me to write about *Three Ages of Woman*, two years after I painted it in 1984. Sharon Veit had bought the painting, and she must be credited with taking a risk, for she admitted not understanding it, as others had indicated without explicitly stating. Sharon simply asked me to explain it, so I wrote a guided tour through the painting. In the case of *The Forger's Suite*, there were no questions asked by anyone, just remarks that came of incomprehension. So I took it upon myself to make a defense, where likely none was needed. The exposition surely was, is, foolishness and a futile gesture. What concerns me does not interest others. I should know that by now. The irony is that I look askance and strangely at artist's statements. I have always avoided them, and not without cause. Tzara, and especially Breton, scribbled nonsense enough.

It must be 3.00 again, maybe a little after. I awoke an hour ago, itching from a mosquito bite and came into this front room to read for a time from Graham Greene's collected essays. Janjira is here now, too, asleep on the mat on the floor, as I type away. The mosquito drove her out, as well. In the kitchen, water for Swiss instant coffee is boiling on the hotplate from Japan. I like it with canned evaporated milk from the Danish dairy, which we buy at a Chinese sundries shop. It will help the pill that is Greene's *Soupsweet Land* slide on down. He writes of those men who congregate in Freetown at the City Hotel. It reminds me of the venues for expatriates here and in Chiang Mai, places where people like myself sop up suds -- the "home away from home for men who had not encountered success at any turn of the long road and who no longer expected it.... They were failures...." Greene is right on that score, even as his prose puts the lie to another of my pretenses, that of being a writer. Never mind, he's still good company.

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Now ya know, Pardner, there's another burr under ma saddle. It appears certain that "*Shrove Tuesday*" will not be published after all. Editions Duang Kamol in Bangkok

is in a financial crunch, and funding for publishing the book is no longer forthcoming. I was hoping, finally, to break into print. As it is, I have enough personal letters of rejection to cover a bathroom wall -- even after not having sent out a manuscript for years. I am not a masochist. It is tiring to be told repeatedly by editors that one writes well, but that one's writing is "unsuitable for our list."

It must be either Oxford or University of Chicago that sent my favorite rejection letter, vis-a'-vis Textual Matters: *Hokusai's Great Wave, Annotated*. An editor wrote that the book was timely, humorous, insightful, and well-crafted; *but....* I remember wishing the book had been less of these things and more printable. Still, I would not for this reason change a word.

I no more write for myself than I paint for myself. Earlier, I said it is wrong-headed to act as if one does these things solely to please oneself. To assert this is solipsistic, if not arrogant. Writing is language, and that implies the existence of another. Though of different orders, so too music and painting are languages. This is not a new idea. The point of this restatement is to say there is no need to make what is in my mind's eye, except to show another. I already know my thoughts, so I write or paint them for others (including an ideal audience like your self) always in the hope of being understood and appreciated. But this has little or nothing to do with following fashion or straining to please or making claptrap. Nor has it anything to do with its opposite, namely setting out to shock sensibilities. As an end, not only is shock threadbare after a single wash, it's sophomoric and inane. For me, then, the purpose of art is communication, which in turn has as its object the separation of the audience from its money. (Can't fool an ideal reader.)

Nevertheless, sensibilities are sometimes offended inadvertantly, in which case there is nothing to be done. Or one's work goes unappreciated, in which case there remains nothing to be done. All the same, one tries to communicate and always works for others. If the dumb fucks don't get it, screw 'em. (There's always ambivalence, doncha know.)

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Dogs were talking, and I could not sleep. My thoughts turned to twenty years ago, then thirty years ago, then thirty-five; to a wedding cake, an old movie, and a girl with corn-silk hair.

By the time I saw it, the cake was already six months in the refrigerator of Brandon Tartikoff's minimalist Midtown apartment. I wondered how it would be sliced -- no, sectioned -- come the anniversary, and just who would eat the confectioner's art. Surely sent by a devotee of Shiva, the cake's frosting flowed from the condensed cream ejaculate of a magnificently vertical male member, the polychromed versimilitude of which would have done Duane Hanson proud.

I never met the Tartikoffs, although not too long ago I saw the televised and gracefully striking Lily, who had once danced ballet, present an award named for her late husband. Tartikoff was a past director of programming at NBC and died after a long bout with cancer.

The old movie was about a drifter coming into Lawrence, Kansas, and making off with the Queen of Neewollah. I saw "Picnic" on television late one night in 1972 when, for some now forgotten reason, I was depressed. It was just the tonic and brought me around.

The girl was from Greensberg, and I met her during a summer band camp at Fort Hays. She played clarinet, turned lots of heads, and went walking with me in the evening, a triumph of the first magnitude. As it turned out, however, she slipped up in the couple



letters we exchanged after our returns home, and the horrible truth came out: she was entering college that fall, while I was entering my junior year of high school. It was a shattering revelation. Not only had she lied to me, but I had been seeing an older woman. I mean, my god. Well, perhaps twenty-five years later, while talking with my mother's mother about her mother's family, the Bennetts, I learned that the girl, a Burton, was also a distant relative. Alas, let us speak no more of this woeful and incestuous tale.

Baleful musings aside, I began to consider how much my life has been determined by relations with women. Here I am, half-way around the world, where I finally found one true heart. When the dogs stopped barking, I cuddled next to her, all wrapped in a comforter. To my surprise, there was a pounding beat in my ear. I felt my wrist and counted, but it seemed more *adagio* than *presto assai*; so I felt the side of Janjira's throat, and her pulse was racing. I nudged her and asked if she was having a bad dream. She murmured yes, and then things calmed down.

Her father has cancer, and he is very weak now. I supported him this evening, as he shuffled an heroic ten yards, his exercise for the day. He will return home tomorrow, and stay in Janjira's old room upstairs, so that Mom and Jaruwana (my sister-in-law) can hear him in the night. However, that bedroom has a Thai style toilet, a squat-pot, and it will be of no avail. I think it will work out that Janjira's father will be sleeping again in Mom's room, where there is a western style toilet, for the first time in twenty years -- and he will finally have to say farewell to his minor wife.

Back to bed. The sun will be up in an hour or so. Time to check Janjira's pulse again, and nudge her awake if necessary. No need for bad dreams on top everything else.

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Boonrawd is Janjira's father's name. Last night, while she was having the bad dream, her father was having another stroke. His first one, maybe five years ago, left him a shuffler on the left side. Now, he cannot move either side, at all.

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For some reason, I am thinking of Conrad O'Brien-French. He was a painter at the Slade School, then in Paris a student under Andre Lhote. At one point, he was also a member of MI5 and a spy. He knew Ian Fleming and fancied that he was, at least in part, the model for Fleming's James Bond. I saw him first in 1976, jumping out of a competition green MG parked in front of a gallery run by Hugo Anderson. I thought he was remarkably spry for someone in his sixties, and I was envious of the attractive woman beside him in the convertible. He was wearing a cap and a hunting jacket, breezed in and out the gallery, jumped back into the car and sped away. I cannot remember a word he said, but the impression he left still lingers. Three years later, I learned he was actually in his mid-eighties, the young woman was in her late-twenties and an airline stewardess to whom he had proposed after an unhurried courtship. This revelation came during dinner at the home of painter James Disney, to which I had been invited to meet Conrad, the guest of honor. The dinner went well, although I drank too much wine and became a buffoon. Conrad, however, was gracious throughout and accommodated my endless questions with finely honed anecdotes. His signature was understatement. Perhaps it had to be, to tell his tale at all, because he had done so many things and done them well.

As the seventeenth Marquis du Castle-Thomond, Conrad had been a boxer at university, a soldier and prisoner of The Great War, an officer with the Canadian Mounted Police, a ski bum and playboy in the Swiss Alps during days, and nights, on His Majesty's

Secret Service. Conrad had been charged with keeping an eye on the buildup of Hitler's Germany. At the time we met for dinner, he had for many years been a member of the Emissaries of Divine Light, a gnostic denomination or sect or cult, depending upon one's view, with centers in Europe, Africa and, of course, North America. He may have had other incarnations about which I know nothing.

Some years after that, I restored a portrait Conrad had painted of Mrs. Brown, a Jamaican woman with a pipe. I also purchased a delicate drawing he had done of Lady Somebody, wife of the Governor. From that point, we began to know each other a little, and it must have been 1985 when I helped to arrange a videotaped interview with him. That was fortunate, getting Conrad on tape, because he died the year following, when I was away in Durango and working as a law clerk.

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For the better part of two years, I was a member of a band called *Sunship* or *Flamingo* or some other name-of-the-week. We could never decide, and in 1970-1971, that did not seem to matter. Music was in the street, with marchers and mace, and the commercial gargantua that now churn out product had yet to capitalize on it. Everything seemed to be coming together then -- hence the coinage "get it together" -- in that brief season of an impulse everywhere in the air. It was the genesis of a new sound that had intelligence, muscle, wildness, and unruly grace, a music that later would be watered down, mixed with processed sugar, packaged, and labeled "fusion." At that time, Miles Davis was the prime mover. The *Soft Machine* also cast a long shadow.

Though none wore motley, our band *Flamingo* was an assortment: Dewey Holloway, Melvin Grant, Bobby Mead, George Tucker, Tim Snode, Brandy Thomas, and myself. We did not come from the same street corner in Detroit. Dewey, from D.C., had played tenor saxophone behind James Brown and Aretha Franklin. Highly versatile guitarist Melvin, energetic and shyly outgoing, was from Philadelphia. Like me, Dewey and Melvin were students at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, but I cannot recall their fields of study. The elusive Bobby, from Grand Junction, Colorado, said little and played introspective guitar. His friend George, a drop-out and native of Fort Collins, played fretless electric bass. Composition major Tim was from Alliance, Ohio, and he "blew" synthesizer, trumpet, and percussion. Brandy was a rock-steady drummer from northern California, also a student at CSU, a fast study and adaptable. And me? I was no longer from Redondo Beach, and I played flugelhorn, trumpet, percussion, and sometimes flute, but only in the "over-blow" style of Jeremy Steig or Ian Anderson of *Jethro Tull*. I never learned to play flute correctly, and probably could not have done, because the embouchure is opposed to that used with brass instruments.

We practiced in Danforth Chapel, a small non-denominational sanctuary on the north end of the Oval, a roundabout in the original campus. It was an elm-rimmed green, large enough for a football field, crisscrossed with pathways and called "Mirkwood" by everyone familiar with *The Hobbit*. Danforth Chapel was secluded from the parkway, snug among bushes, with acoustics that made us sound better than we were. No Chaplain was in residence, there was no guard, and the doors were always open -- at least until one night a co-ed was raped there. But that happened sometime later, after the band had disbanded.

*Flamingo* once played at the CSU radio station, in support of some unidentified cause; once recorded incidental music for a production of *Macbeth* that featured the Scottish usurper as a Latin revolutionary and the weird sisters in cubist costume; and once

performed publicly at a rally following the Kent State shootings. During that week, CSU was effectively shut down by the studentry, and National Guardsmen were poised with rifles on roofs. It was the same week that Old Main, near the Oval, burnt to the ground and knocked the wind out of us all. By the end of the week, *Flamingo* was finished.

My drawing classes were conducted in Old Main. After the fire, we sat the model upon what remained of the steps, gave him a rifle to place across his lap, and draped an American flag over his shoulder. Because the model had a luxuriant 'fro and looked vaguely like Jimi Hendrix, somehow it worked. I have no idea today what it all meant, but it must have felt right to many at the time. We sat in the grass and drew for the usual two hours, concentrating quietly, talking only to George Brownlee, the instructor, as he made his patient rounds. In a few days, our class was removed to the basement of Old Main Annex, where the models could undress and the class returned to business as usual.

The night Old Main burned was a sad one. From out in the countryside, I could see a blaze in the sky over Fort Collins. I jumped into my competition green MG convertible (yes, I had this before I met Conrad O'brien-ffrench), and followed the bright light. The closer I came, the less I could believe the implication. Finally, I parked somewhere near the rail tracks at Mason and Laurel, perhaps behind Bach or Rock Record House where I worked part-time, and walked over to watch the blaze. It was awesome.

Standing in the flashing shadows I saw Patti Fujisaki. We had dated off and on, mostly off, for a year. She was in graphic design and quite the fashion plate, a level head and a kind heart. She was also strikingly pretty, and every time she came near I felt like Sir Ethelbert Wolfric of Awkward-upon-Gaffe. That night, we stood together sadly and watched the demise of one of the campus's few buildings with real character.

Later that week, *Flamingo* made its only public appearance. Students had gathered around the lagoon near the student center, raised a stage and hooked up a sound system. There were speakers, student activists, and bands, of which ours was one. We were on stage all of thirty minutes, and I do not remember what we performed.

What I do remember is the rally one night, that same week, to close down the university. I went to Patti's house to tell her, and she decided to come with me to see what was about. It was late, and there was electricity in the air, a something immanent about to happen. Many began pitching tents (unless like Tim Snode and his roommate, Red Torley, they carried a couch to the demonstration) there by the lagoon, in expectation of news from Berkeley or one of the Ivy League Schools. Patti and I sat together on the grass and attended one ineffectual speaker after another. When a stoned freak offered the use of a sleeping bag, she crawled in and invited me to join her. I should have done, but instead sat beside her, ever the guard and sentinel as she slept until the sunrise. When we walked back to her house, it was empty, and she led me into her bedroom, leaving the door ajar, to show me the layout she was preparing. It was a still room, intimate and orderly, and I was profoundly aware of having been so artlessly led into her private space. I cannot remember what we discussed, if indeed it was anything. No words were needed at all, but I did not know that then, and, finding none, I excused myself. Soon thereafter, Patti started to date a fellow from New Hampshire. I came by one evening to visit her and saw his car, with its license plate that read "Live Free or Die."

There are other things I recall about Patti, but I am not even sure what I have written here is in the right order. These things happened, but suddenly everything looks wrong, as if the events of that week may have happened over months instead. It is a trick of memory, the way things run together, or time gets compressed and events reshuffled. Better to be silent, because I am not a reliable witness, and she deserves better than to be drawn inaccurately. Still...

It was several months after, when I saw her again. I returned to her house, spoke with her roommate who said she was working late in the design studio, walked across campus and then climbed stairs to find her working alone in the large room, under a small lamp. She was lovely and surprised to see me, and she asked how was everything. I was full to bursting with news of someone else, someone who would later hurt me deeply. But I wanted Patti, of all people, to be the first to know. She listened patiently, then said I was lucky and wished me well. It was the last time I ever saw her.

Twenty-five years later, her name came up during a conversation with John Sorbie, who had been her instructor in graphic design. John and I were talking together into a tape machine at *Paris on the Poudre*, where we had agreed to meet for coffee. The interview was transcribed and later partly published in a catalogue for an exhibition of his work. He remembered Patti well and said that she had become a buyer for some large department store like Neiman-Marcus, and that last he had heard, she was living in Honolulu.

I cannot imagine Honolulu, still I hope that Patrice is happy there. The girl that I knew is gone now, but I imagine the woman is every bit as patient as she, and would listen now as she had always listened in those days when I rambled aimlessly and inconclusively about everything and nothing. Really, I was a madman. Now, I suspect that I am thinking of Patti because it was she who saw me through a long and difficult time in which I was sorting out the person I would become; a time that she may not have understood completely and that I understood not at all. In many respects, it was a time like the present. Somehow it would be nice to see her, and this may be one reason I am writing to you, my ideal reader -- the need to talk to someone.

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What was I thinking then? Didion writes that keeping a journal serves to maintain a nodding acquaintance between the person one is now and the person one was once. The trouble with this view is that I kept no journal then; notebooks were still twenty years away. Within a couple years either side of the burning of Old Main, I registered for the draft, released a pair of falcons, worked in the woods of Virginia, saw portraits by Rembrandt, read novels by Fowles and Nabokov and Stein and Wolfe, turned from jazz to classical music, spent a night in jail for art theft, met a Swedish woman who ran a gallery, and married her assistant. There is more, of course, but a longer list would become a muddle. I don't know; perhaps I should tell you about some of these things. They all seemed important, once. Yesterday, while standing in a urinal, I began to recollect small pieces of the distant past, my boyhood, as if they were smoked glass that had shattered cleanly into large pieces that could be reassembled whole with careful gluing. I took this to mean that my version of what happened would be full of what Nick Carraway called "the most obvious suppressions" (that bit about careful gluing). It would be rather like a paleo-anthropologist assembling scattered bones in such way as to support a favorite theory, while discounting fossils that contradict it. Like the anthropologist, I have vested interests. Without elaboration, I would still mention some shards. "*Mr. Popper's Penguins*" was the first book I read twice, while "*Black Like Me*" was the first ostensibly adult book. Dave Brubeck's "*Take Five*" was my first jazz recording. It was followed by "*Sketches of Spain*," the first of perhaps thirty-five recordings by Miles Davis in an ever-expanding and varied collection that I did not set aside until my late twenties. Hard to imagine that today I rarely listen to music, whereas I once listened carefully for two or three hours daily.

What else? There was an interest in jai-alai, played with tennis balls against the garage door at the home of a Cuban refugee. (We tried golf balls, but they did too much damage.) There was a scrapbook full of political cartoons by Herbert Block and others. There was a leather-bound, gold-edged, red-lettered and profusely illustrated King James authorized version of the Christian Greek scriptures, a present from my father's grandmother. There were Hardy Boys mysteries and National Geographics. Why is it that the books now seem most important? As a boy, I wanted to be a bullfighter. So I read every book by Barnaby Conrad in the public library, as well as Hemingway's "*The Sun Also Rises*" and "*Death in the Afternoon*." My brother turned the handlebars of a bicycle and rode it straight at me, after I watched the *corridas* from Mexico on Lawrence and Helen Kueneman's UHF (or was it VHF) channels and wanted to practice a *passe por alto*. With a Berlitz book, I tried to learn Spanish. Things got complicated when George Kueneman gave me a handbook for learning Esperanto that he had found at the University of Mexico City. He also practically gave me an Italian-made indoor track deraileur, selling it for pennies on the dollar. (When I was perhaps ten, I had asked his younger sister, Mary, a pretty airline stewardess, to wait for me. From one journey, she had brought a porcelain wood duck for my valence box. I put it next to a delicately flocked model of a squirrel that she had assembled, which was next to a bar of soap that she had carved, which was next to an organ grinder's monkey that she had made from tube socks. I never liked the guys she brought home, especially the one with five-o'clock shadow. No, wait... the shadow belonged to Norm Engen, who stayed briefly at Kueneman's and was killed returning a punt for Cal-Poly. Still, Mary was usually skiing somewhere. Finally, when she moved to Aspen, I forgot her. Even then, I was fickle.) I read books on falconry, then put jesses on the legs of my pigeons. Before that, there was a small cage beside my bed, which housed a pet mouse. Years later, I would feed the likes of him to a predator -- but only once. After that, I substituted ground round. Any more, I would probably introduce raptors to extra firm tofu.

I took Baby, the Smith's old German shepherd, for walks. Then there was Java, a collie mixed perhaps with husky, which George rescued from an island of the Harbor Freeway. About a year after our departure from California, the Kuenemans sent her to Colorado, where she would run and roam for a dozen years. I loved Java. There is an old photograph of the two of us under an elm. All the same, she was shared with other members of the family, so I guess my own and only pets were pigeons, then hawks.

What I chiefly remember, after keeping pigeons two years, was the necessity of thinning the flock, which at one point came to as many as thirty-five birds. I was forced by adults to cut off their heads, so I made a grim game of it by comprising a list, then judging each bird and pronouncing sentence. It was a terrible power, being God, or a Roman emperor, or a District Court judge. Each bird had a name. In order to choose, I had to invent reasons. One day, sans due process, I turned to drowning them in a gunny sack, submerging them in a petroleum barrel; but even when using a pole to push them under, I could feel their water-logged wings flapping. When I turned twelve, I released all of them. For two days they sat on telephone poles or in neighbors' trees. I refused to feed them. I threw rocks at them, and eventually they flew away. Then, I dismantled the coop my father had built on a monthly weekend visit. I was tired of scouring green slime from galvanized pans, cleaning nests, and determining who would live or die.

Ten years later, after only a few weeks of their capture, I did the same with hawks and falcons. It no longer made sense to tether birds that should be flying freely over fields. Besides, how could one hold back a bird named "Gypsy"? About that same time, a poet asked me to do an illustration for "*The Sparrowhawk*," which she had translated and would

soon publish, an elegiac sonnet I understood perfectly well. It describes the reflexive impaling of a tiersel on a pitchfork, and the remorseful aftermath, on the floor of the barn, where the killer notices how fine-drawn and beautiful are its gray and tabby feathers, like the ripples on a canal when winds come to play.

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As a kid, I played basketball with Paul Westphal. We also played flag-football and volleyball, but mostly it was basketball. Every move, including feigning fouls, that he made as a Boston Celtic was perfected on the playground at Adams Junior High, sometimes right in my face. Although at recess we were usually on the same side, during the summer city league, we played for different teams. I want to mention a single game, not just because it makes me look "good," but also because it was the sole time I did better than Paul. Whenever we played one-on-one at a penny a pop, he always won. It was monotonous: 21-17, or 21-16. The best I ever did was losing 21-19. I was leading 19-15, he was slumping, and I should have put him away. But when a hook shot went in and came out, I knew it was not meant to be. Next thing I knew, I had drawn a foul. Then, both my shots were blocked. There came a power move up the middle, followed by the swish of an outside jumper, and Westy had rallied to beat me yet again.

The subject, however, is Beryl Junior High. They were the champions of the city league. When my rag-tag team played them one Saturday morning, I was late for the game. I had to walk a considerable distance to a gymnasium I had never before seen, it was hot and I got diarrhea. I remember washing underwear in a restroom of a gas station. When I arrived, the game was already mid-way through the third period. Somehow, the coach looked relieved and sent me in immediately. This probably helped, because there was no time to think and within thirty seconds I had made a basket and dropped two foul shots. It was a whirl. The team immediately picked up, Beryl looked stunned, and at the final buzzer I had 17 points. What's more, we had won.

Now, the reason for telling this tale is that Beryl had held Paul to 11 points for an entire game the previous weekend. I learned this from my coach, who remarked that I should be given a trophy for the most points scored that season against the champs. Otherwise unbeatable, they must have taken our team too lightly. I did not care much about the win, however, because I was completely deflated when coach explained privately that his remark about the trophy was merely a figure of speech.

Paul was a nice guy, for someone so competitive. He had an older brother who played basketball for USC or UCLA, I can't remember which, and Paul planned to follow. One day, we were throwing a baseball across his parents' front yard, preparing for spring, working on his breaking pitch, and we started to discuss the future. Paul had it mapped. He explained that we would play football and basketball for the same high school, win the state championship, receive athletic scholarships to university, win a national championship, then turn professional. It made sense until that summer when, out of the blue, the family moved to northern Colorado. Instead of playgrounds and gymnasias, there were fields of alfalfa and bails to be bucked.

Two summers later, I returned to visit. One final time, we played one-on-one. I cannot remember the score, but Paul won as always. Then he beat me mercilessly at Yahtzee, a game I had never played. I returned to Colorado and time passed. When I was at CSU, he was at USC, but I did not know that until my senior year, when I heard his name over a radio. Everyone but me knew about his exploits, because I had by then lost interest in basketball, and had not seen a televised game for several years. Nor did I

anymore read the sports pages. Meanwhile, he had become a national figure. I did not see him play until the close of his career. Perhaps he was with the Lakers then, I cannot recall rightly. What I do remember is Paul coming off the bench in a tight game, taking it up the middle, getting "fouled" immediately, then sinking two important points. It was the same old Westy, doing the same old song and dance; and, for a moment, I was back on the playground of twenty years earlier.

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Good morning. Have not written to you in several days, there's so much else on-going. The novel I earlier mentioned would be on hold indefinitely is now underway. Apparently, writing this rant has helped get me started. Also, I feel less blue than when I began writing to you. Thanks for that; you have been helpful.

It's day in, day out with Janjira's father. I have been driving him to physical therapy with the help of two young attendants, live-ins, who lift him in and out of the car. I did that a couple times without assistance, but my back is no longer willing to continue. These days, it is the boss.

There is a cricket outside. Not even the birds are awake. You would think that yesterday morning I would have heard the gunshot that killed a man in the house behind me. He was getting into his car when a motorcycle with two riders sped by. No one saw faces. As the dead man was a speculator in land, the murder may have been related to business.

After a glance at the last entry, I see we are no longer discussing art only. I hope you do not get too frustrated with my digressions. A good rant needs to be a little out of focus, but not so blurry as to be incoherent -- at which point the ranter is to be avoided if not institutionalized. So we are now covering music as well, and perhaps personal history, and I suppose that is fine for me. As my ideal reader, it should not be too tedious for you. However, I will keep you in mind. It really is not possible to write even the most naked confession without being circumspect and self-serving. This is one of my objections to Augustine, by the way. His pride makes him the worst of all possible sinners. Frankly, he protests too much. (Another is his mixing of scriptural writings with Greek philosophy; but then again, this was already well underway in Alexandria, so I should not hold him solely responsible for something that was in the air.) For my part, I have already admitted that I will be no more honest with you than anyone else is with others. Even now, when I know you are unlikely to read this, I still want to look good on the off chance that you just might be reading. You would be right to suppose that, were I an Assyrian general, my stele would tell of the tens of thousands I had killed with a single blow. And if I were to make a career of being a saint, as did Augustine, I would be the greatest of sinners. It takes one to know one, as I heard often as a boy. Pride is pride, the rest is just a matter of degree, and so I should not be too hard with Augustine. Blah, blah, blah... woof, woof, woof.

Time to take a bath and go. It is finals week, and today I will proctor two examinations, the first a writing class, the second a reading class -- two of the five subjects I baby-sit. This has been my motto all term:

การสอนคือการเลี้ยงเด็ก

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Binh Rybacki has been selected "Woman of the Year" by a service organization. A couple weeks ago I wrote that she was laid off from Hewlett-Packard/ Agilent after 23 years. Now, she is honored by Kiwanis International. What a difference a handful of days makes.

I received word from Gerald Ravenscroft, who did not respond when I asked whether he had nominated her. Of course, that makes me think he may have had a hand in it. I introduced Jerry to Binh last year in Colorado, and I know he has been writing checks since then to support Children of Peace International (COPI). Jerry's an interesting man, and a good one, too, who tries to hide it behind a skeptical and politely gruff manner. He's another book, really -- a former Flying Tiger shot down over Yunnan, China. This past year, I painted him in a leather flight jacket with squadron insignia. Come to think of it, I painted Binh, too, in 1999 -- one late-night sitting, then I painted doves (the COPI logo) gathering around her like Francis of Assisi.

Like all Women of the Year, there's a great man behind her. Binh calls Jack her "rock." He is a steady one, especially considering that he is chronically depressed and has a bad stomach. Humor, I think, keeps him going. (This reminds me of a script he and I wrote years ago for the final episode of M\*A\*S\*H. Frankly, it was better than the televised production.) His hunting dogs also help. Jack works them when he can. Most evenings they are freed to range over what little open land remains near the house. The house, by the way, sits on a corner now hidden in a jungle of trees and shrubs, the most reliable barometer of how long they have lived there. When we unloaded furniture from the rental truck, the front yard was dirt. The house was outside town in a barren new subdivision, and you could see Longs Peak out the kitchen window. Jack planted seedlings by and by, and laid down sod (I think I helped with that, too). Everything grew tall, the concrete cracked as the house settled, the clapboard peeled and was scraped and repainted at least twice, and the view of Longs disappeared as other houses were built. For some time now, Jack and Binh have considered adding onto the West side. Perhaps this is because anyone who can find a chair in the front room wins a door prize. Not that chairs are in short supply. Rather, the room is filled with books, photographs, paintings, piled papers, porcelain figurines, an upright piano, boxes to be shipped, clothing to be ironed, on and on. It's not a showroom, after all, it's a living room. Visitors who fail to win the door prize end up sitting on stools around the counter in Binh's kitchen. If one is lucky, there will be pho, spring rolls, mung bean dessert, or cold pizza. If not that, check the closet pantry; but be careful opening the doors. It is racked, stacked, and packed. "Binh shops for the year," we often chide.

Jack met Binh in the late 70s, when she came to work at a restaurant he was managing. I met Jack right after they were married. Hugo Anderson introduced us. He and Jack had been meeting for Saturday morning coffee at a café two doors down from his gallery, just around the corner from where I was painting murals. Hugo said I should meet Jack, because he was a writer. This is how Jack and I began to meet from time to time at the café, with or without Hugo.

One evening I was jogging home, when a voice hailed. I was running past Jack while he was watering the shallow front lawn of his rental house. I had no idea he lived on that particular street. Nor did I know that his new wife was now working with one of my sisters at a local bank. In fact, I did not know he had a wife at all, even after months of meeting for coffee at the cafe. Nor did he tell me that he had a new son, right off the assembly line. We always discussed books or news or sports or politics. Anyway, he invited me in, sweat and all, from the low but bright evening sun into a narrow, dark room with a low ceiling. There was a cradle and beside it stood Binh. Because my eyes were



adjusting, I almost missed both. She seemed shy and retiring. I have since learned how wrong first impressions can be. Binh is a dynamo and one of the most capable people I know. This was revealed gradually, however, over a period of years.

If I had to say what is driving Binh now, I would venture three things. First would be her relation to her father, who was once a professor at the University of Saigon. Second, an attitude toward those less fortunate. She learned compassion from her mother who fed people who came through a hole in the wall of the family compound. Third, there is the death of Garrett, the second of three sons. I was in the room with Jack and Binh at Children's Hospital in Denver, when we arranged Garrett's hair and straightened his clothes after lighting the candles on a cake to celebrate seven months of life. He made it that far and died that night, from a rare metabolic disorder. That was in October 1987. To this day, the two most astounding things I have ever witnessed were the first breath of my son, Aaron, and the last breath of Garrett. Binh had stayed with him in the hospital, 'round the clock, for over a month. She never left his room. After he died, she went into a funk for a long time, and she and I would talk in her kitchen for hours at a stretch about almost everything. Beyond that, she helped prepare me to leave for Thailand in 1990. She had begun to write, and she published under a pseudonym in a Vietnamese literary journal out of Los Angeles. When I returned to Colorado in 1993, Binh had also returned from Vietnam for the first time in eighteen years. She was disturbed by what she saw, especially the orphans everywhere, and she determined that something had to be done. She began to build a network of dedicated and trusted supporters, some of whom would later betray her. In the process of establishing a half dozen orphanages throughout her homeland, she has been slandered, libeled, interrogated, investigated, detained, and brought to court. She has dealt with intrigue and political positioning at her place of employment. She has hauled medical equipment and medicines halfway around the globe, organized armies of surgeons, paid their hotel bills when they forgot or misunderstood. She has sold baked goods, given slide programs, spoken before congregations and service clubs, and travelled from state to state -- all just to tell another small group of curious listeners about COPI.

This is how you might understand her. Sompong is a taxi driver in Bangkok. Binh began to call him regularly to meet her at Don Muang airport as she came and went from Vietnam. She paid him to drive all day, everyday she was in Bangkok. When his taxi went out of commission, Binh paid not only for the mechanical work, but also for refurbishment. At the same time, Binh's colleague and right-hand man, Tim Fasching, learned that Sompong was raising a boy, not his relative, who had been abandoned. Fasching began sending money to support the kid.

For some time, Jack has been joking that being married to Binh is, in some ways, like being married to Mother Theresa. I take this to mean that he cannot criticize her for being gone so often, or on the telephone in the middle of the night, or busy at the computer. "Binh? No, she's not here just now, she's out saving the world," is how he sometimes puts it.

I love irony. Kiwanis International once named Mother Theresa as Woman of the Year. For a long time, my feeling has been that Binh's effort would be recognized one day. I just did not expect it to happen any time soon.

So why am I dejected lately? I have been fortunate to know some extraordinary people.

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Yesterday I received an e-mail from Janet Armstrong. Her daughter Suzanne will marry in September, and she raised my name for someone to perform the ceremony. Imagine my very real surprise. I thought about it all day, whether it was appropriate to presume to do such a thing. My understanding of marriage has changed over the years, along with my understanding of what is sacred. This morning, I knocked this out:

"We are gathered to witness a wedding. This happens all the time, and people who witness weddings know that vows are made for different reasons. There are marriages of true hearts, marriages of true minds, and marriages of property in fee simple absolute. Following current fashion, marriages are formal or of the type audiences enjoyed in *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. In either case, the discomfiture shows. We no longer know quite what to do at a wedding.

This may be because marriage presents a paradox. It is the most personal and private promise one may enter. Yet there is a public dimension too, because the community has a stake in stable relations. Others are affected when two people decide together to make a new world; and they are affected should that world come to nothing.

We often hear that marriage is an honorable estate, not to be entered on a whim. "*Words, words, words!*" says a Danish prince. We feel this because old formulas no longer have force, so we look for other means to say what we mean -- we reach for a chapbook of poems or search for a song that was popular during the Ford Administration. That's how desperate we are in the end, when we fumble for words. We no longer know quite what to say at a wedding, but we still feel the need to say something... "

It went on like this for another ten pages. Absolutely turgid. So, Janet has written in return to say that my script has helped them to change their minds about asking me to say anything at all. Fun! Well, I thought that would do it. Now, in fact, I am not even invited to the wedding.

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Yesterday's meeting with the committee from Bangkok was inconclusive. It appears that Yonok will receive permission to open the new arts curricula, given some adjustment of the course descriptions that previously were approved. Other faculty members and I, including the man who is to be Dean, were in the meeting five minutes, then asked to wait outside for another "five minutes" that proved to be three hours. Meanwhile, A. Suwipa, who wrote the proposal and started down this road three years ago, was with the committee alone. She carried the day, if it was carried at all.

My dilemma is this: classes at Yonok begin on 3 June. I must resign from Rajabhat 90 days before actually leaving. This means I must resign from Rajabhat this week. So, there is a risk involved. Should I resign and Yonok not receive approval, I will be hanging out to dry. Either I would have no teaching position at all, or I would be somewhere I do not wish to return except for a new curriculum.

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A screen door on this, my rental house, may be the concrete detail to explain this place in its entirety. It is hollow metal made to look like wrought iron, with four rows of twelve curlicues each running across the top, middle, and bottom of the screen neatly and evenly. Or at least, this is how the screen probably looks in the original design. But there

are not forty-eight neat and regular curlicues, there are forty-six. Two are non-conforming. They are in the middle, to the right. When I sit at the kitchen table, they are eye-level.

I have given these two some thought. Did a material man fail to show before the deadline for a quota of screen doors? Were these two curlicues the last ones made as the company went under? Or did the welder, being momentarily blinded, grab from the wrong box of curlicues?

As an ideal reader, you have already guessed that I am assuming the door is somehow defective. So what, if anything, is wrong with a couple non-conforming curlicues? If the door is perfectly functional, there is nothing wrong with it, which is why it cost full price. Why, then, am I going on about it? For several reasons, I think it is a telling clue to the Thai character.

Putting aside the continuing tendency toward horror vacui, consider the symmetry of Thai designs and the emphasis upon orderly appearances. Better yet, look at Thai gardens. Look at the shrubs. Even along stretches of highway, these are pruned and clipped into onion domes, clubs, spades, and other ornamental shapes. They exhibit an extreme need for control, as is the case with the Thai bureaucracy. Once, I had to re-complete a form in its entirety because my signature extended one centimeter past the end of a line five centimeters in length. I switched to micro-script, and squeezed my signature into a space of 2.5 centimeters. The immigration officer was displeased, but said nothing further.

I think the non-conforming pair of curlicues illustrates a tendency to cut corners. There may have been a conforming pair in the vicinity, but why bother to get up when something good enough is at hand? I equate this with the tendency of drivers to pass on the right side when I am making a right-hand turn at an intersection. (Remember, we drive on the left here.)

I could rant about "the driving style" here in Thailand, but all foreigners do this and sometimes get paid in the process. English language publications, whether newspapers or slick magazines, carry the occasional gripe piece. But there is nothing like the strained humor of an ex-pat to put one off the subject altogether. I sometimes think there should be a law that requires seasoned British journalists to check-in their laptops at Immigration.

Can you tell that I am irritable this morning? Yes, I am, and have been for two or three days. More than is usually the case, yet always the case, I feel I am in the proverbial fish bowl. (And just what is the proverb? "People who live in fish bowls should expect plastic plants, air through a hose, and gaudy ceramic castles"?) However tired, fish bowl is the figure. Using this as the ground or tenor or vehicle (whichever term applies -- I can't think straight some mornings, although I explain tropes to students all the time), the Thai become a school of fish waiting just below the skin of the surface. (Wait a minute; now it is the Thai who are in the fish bowl, not I. What the hell. We're all in a fish bowl here.) When the first flake of food falls, all will converge like piranhas of the Rio Negro in a *National Geographic* video. No one waits for even a second. That's how drivers treat intersections, entrances, exits, single-lane roads, the lot. (It's safe to say this little essay is now a ramble. A good writer should keep matters under control. You'll have to excuse me momentarily. I need to read what's above, to recall the tropic under discussion.)

Ah, ha. Orderliness and cutting corners.

In fairness, there is another side to the Thai trait under discussion. It could be viewed as a form of "waste not, want not." How so? you ask. Yesterday, for example, I was admiring a long strip of gray duct tape running along a seam in the white wall of a business downtown. The gray turns abruptly to bright red, then to sap green, then back to gray. The red and green are toward the middle of the course, and they over-lap the gray --

meaning that, if we are to follow the logic of stratigraphy, these colorful strips were applied last. Why buy another expensive roll of gray duct tape when there are remnants of red and green at hand? (Or, alternatively, the owner may be red-green color-blind. Must ask, next time I am in the shop. It is so difficult to be a reliably accurate field reporter. How does one factor so many variables?)

In turn, this puts me in mind of a fence I also saw yesterday -- a picket fence made from lengths of wood freshly painted bright blue. The boards varied as much as three feet. I had no question about it whatsoever, because years ago I came across just such a fence, albeit unpainted, on the road to a village where I lived. I asked the man who was erecting it whether he would cut the pickets to an even length. He looked at me patiently and asked whether I thought his fence would be there forever. His point was, once the fence is down, the wood might be needed for another purpose, and it would be difficult now to estimate what lengths might be needed at that future time.

He had a point. Still, I cannot see how any of this explains non-conforming curlicues. As for my giving so much time to this conundrum, I would only point out that Graham Greene once wrote about watching houseflies fornicate in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Some days, there is much to do. I suppose this means I should stop complaining and get busy.

A seasoned British journalist would end by observing that "Thais like neat shrubs, I like neat pickets. We just differ on what needs to be in order." At two baht per word, I should have enough verbiage to buy a bottle of ice-cold whatever is on tap. Should one wait 'til noon?

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I began with a remark that is less than charitable, about being in the land of "no-thought." Along this line, yesterday I purchased a book by an American historian of Thailand, Professor David K. Wyatt. I own and have studied most of his writings. The book in question is entitled "*Siam in Mind*," and its burden is to demonstrate that Thailand has an intellectual history. Why? Wyatt writes:

"We are told that... every region of the world... has an intellectual history... except Southeast Asia. Lacking any 'intellectual history,' the people of Southeast Asia, historians seem to be telling us, did not think, as if they somehow lacked mental capacity, or were occupied instead with more mundane affairs. Is it possible that, if 'intellectual history' is the study of thought and products of thought, then the people of Southeast Asia did not think? Can this be true?

"I have been trying since at least 1977 to argue the contrary; but I am left thinking that perhaps no one has been paying any attention. This slim book is an effort to try to argue the contrary, at least for Siam or Thailand."

I was surprised that Wyatt had written a book addressing this question, a book in which he explicitly states there are historians (somehow missed in all my years of studying Thailand) of the same view as mine. It has been my opinion for some years now, and I have often chastised myself for such a mean-spirited view. Now that I have finished reading Wyatt's "defense," I want to say not only that he has failed to prove his case, but that the failure is distressing insofar as it is my view confirmed.

I should state that view flatly, so there is no misunderstanding. There is no question for me whether Thai people have the capacity to think. They do have, but they seldom use it in any but mundane ways.

Their thought is practical. There are two sides to this. Thais are famous for last minute improvisations. It must be admitted that Thais pull together exceedingly well. Their last-minute scurrying can be deft, but it can also be exasperating when difficulties might easily have been avoided. Improvisations become necessary because no one, in advance, gave any thought to some matter. If I were asked to choose an adjective to describe most Thais of my acquaintance, that word would be "oblivious."

There are highly intelligent, astute and capable people here. This needs to be emphasized in order to make clear what I am trying to say. There is little evidence to indicate that Thais are intellectual in any way. They are not inclined to abstract thought, nor to introspection. Analysis and argumentation, where these exist at all, are pale and slight by Western standards.

Western standards. Maybe that's the rub. Maybe there is a great deal going on that I cannot see or understand, because the mode remains unfamiliar. If this is the case, then the Thai are unique in all the world, for other cultures have analyses and argumentation that are apparent even in translation. Here I am reading in Thai, and I cannot find it. Then again, maybe I just have not read far enough.

I am inclined to believe that the disinclination to think comes of Buddhist indoctrination. When I observe that Buddhism emphasizes the avoidance of thought, a friend of mine likes to answer that this emphasis is the end product of a long line of systematic thought. Certainly he is right about this; but it is a line of thought worked out in India, not here.

So there it is.

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Though I am not very good at it, I have been writing in Thai lately. I finished a series of short sketches on Shakespeare for a web-site of the Rajabhat Institute, and I am in the midst of writing on deconstruction and postmodernism. It is interesting and frustrating -- more the former than the latter. The challenge is to use a dharmacentric language to describe a logocentric one. So far, the results are not worth the effort, but I hope to produce something readable and clear sometime.

Why am I bothering to do this? Because a Thai teacher held up a book on postmodernism and society, then asked if I knew anything about the subject. The book was written in Thai -- a thesis or dissertation that got published. What does that mean? Someone perceived a need and an audience. The edition was small: 1,200 copies, in a nation of nearly 70,000,000 people.

The teacher had only read a dozen pages and described it to me as difficult. Yes, I said. I am writing now because someone is curious and willing to make an effort. It made my month. It also made me reconsider what I wrote above.

It occurs to me that Thai society is similarly situated to the States one hundred years ago, or even mediaeval Europe, when the Moors kept civilization alive in Spain. Here, most people are tied to the land, with little opportunity to learn past a middle-school education. Many are still illiterate. How can they produce anything? At the same time, there is an emerging postmodern environment among an elite. The sense of dislocation must be extreme for many Thais, perhaps most. It seems to me that "intellectual products" will come in time; unless, of course, the Thais have too much sense to spin their mental wheels. Maybe they know better than to give much time to abstraction. It certainly has done me little good.

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It's five o'clock in the morning, Sunday, and there is thunderingly loud music coming from the next village. Some idiot with a microphone is droning over the top of it, as well. Last night, this noise went until midnight. We had it also the night before.

What is the reason for the ruckus? Who knows. I think it is unrelated to the firecrackers that should begin popping when the sun rises. The Chinese set these off every morning at this time of year, after decorating graves at their cemeteries.

When dogs and motorcycles stop keeping one up all night, karaoke systems and fireworks take over. Charming. I cannot remember the last night's sleep I had.

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Seven weeks ago, I ordered a set of Isabey brushes from Jerry's Artarama, a supply house based in North or South Carolina. It was my first electronic purchase, using a new credit card. When, after a month, no brushes had arrived, I sent an e-mail to the company and inquired after my order. They responded by saying that the order was not shipped, due to some "red flag" or other going up. They also said the order would go out that very day. The next day, I received another e-mail from the company, confirming the shipment. This confirmation was three weeks ago, so it is now seven weeks since I first placed the order.

Last week I purchased a number of pressed board panels from a local bookseller. I also found a pint of acrylic gesso in Chiangmai, and a half dozen inferior "artist's quality" bristle brushes. A third shop has some small tubes of Cotman oils (student grade colors), but the selection is small and bizarre: Prussian blue, alizarin crimson, Pthalo green, ivory black, some deep purple. No white.

Last week, I learned that Yonok College (soon to become a full university) received permission from the Ministry of University Affairs in Bangkok to open three new faculties, including a Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts. I am scheduled to teach aesthetics, history of Western art, creative thinking, and painting -- although painting does not begin until next year. Students in the new fine arts program begin studio classes in the second year of a five-year BFA program. The first year is spent in drawing, design, art history, humanities classes, etc. The fifth year is for "thesis," and it is spent entirely in the studio.

Of course, I hope to be painting again myself, some time before this. Hence the search for materials. Brother Glen may ship my paints and brushes from Colorado, but I am worried they will not arrive safely -- in which case I would be out more than I can afford to replace, thanks to the exchange rates. Had I brought supplies with me when returning here, they would have been confiscated at Los Angeles International, as happened to an acquaintance two months after my departure. (The aftermath of the World Trade Center.)

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Songkrand, the traditional Thai new year and water festival is over. There was a new record set: 66,000 accidents with 647 fatalities, over a three-day weekend. I stayed home and wrote, mostly. In the last couple days, I have begun to venture out. Last night, I drove past a new karaoke bar called "Sweet Vampires." Maybe it could become a haven from the drudgery of the daily dull -- a venue for people with red, green, or purple hair, pierced body parts, and tantric tattoos. You know, maximally interesting people crowded into a smoke-filled, box-like room painted black, with loudspeakers every two or three feet and

flashing lights. Boomp-boomp-boomp-boomp-boomp-boomp-boomp-boomp. What a fucking bore. I need either a Colorado forest or a Bartok piano concerto.

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Kannika, one of my former students, recently saw her father shot to death. Both she and her mother know the man who pulled the trigger. He is free after paying police B. 400,000. The murder apparently has something to do with land, and the cost of the bribe was factored into the expense of development. Someone stands to make a bundle.

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It's 3 o'clock in the morning. The man next door was snoring so loudly I awoke, and now I am telling you about it. It seems an appropriate time to mention that Janjira and I are moving house soon. We found a place near the airport, which has arrivals and departures in the morning and afternoon. The house abuts a rice field and the neighbors are not too close. There is a well, and rain is collected for drinking. There is also an old dog we cannot turn out, because the owner took it in. It's name is "luke-chin," which may be translated as "meatball."

I am told that because the house is relatively isolated, we will be a target for thieves. I am hoping to use one of three bedrooms for a studio, if painting supplies ever make it here. I still have not received the Isabey brushes, nor the materials that brother Glen recently boxed and sent from Colorado. Frankly, I am expecting to lose all of it.

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The rainy season is here. It has rained the past four days, heavily at times, then intermittently. The sun occasionally appears between clouds, so it is hot and muggy. I guess I have forgot how uncomfortable a body can be with clothing sticking to it and the slightest motion causing profuse perspiration. Never mind.

This morning I went to Yonok College to meet with Dr. Srisook and A. Suwipa. I was wondering why I still have not a contract when classes begin in two weeks.

It turns out the new fine and applied arts faculty has had a bad month. The dean resigned before assuming duties, because he was hired at Chiangmai University, an institution with more stature than our little school. A. Saksith, who has taught twice before at Yonok, has decided to stay in Phuket rather than return to Lampang. If I were 34 as is he, I too would stay on the island. His decision means we are short one very fine instructor of graphics and drawing. Not only that, our first class of sixty students is now only six, with but a single fine art major in painting.

At the meeting, Dr. Srisook asked what would this student do after graduation. I replied that was a fair question and asked whether they wanted me to teach this year, after all. I said I might come next year, and teach somewhere else while waiting for the program to get underway. She then told me that I have an interview with the selection committee next Monday afternoon.

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In the last year or so, I have been hearing music in my head. This has not happened since my twenties, when I stopped writing music before I had really begun. What little I wrote

was stored in a box for years, then one day thrown out along with other papers that seemed no longer worth keeping.

I suppose this negation began in 1974, when the Denver Symphony Orchestra was in residence at Colorado State University. I was studying with Dr. Kent "Doc" Holliday. He took me on as a special study in composition, even though I was a non-major who had barely passed classes in music theory. (I was bored to death.) As his student, I wrote a piano sonata and an octet for cellos; then decided to write a four-hand piano score for a symphony. For this last, I did not chose a key, but rather wrote accidentals for the sake of simplicity. As I remember, I wanted to concentrate on theme, development, and so forth, and not be overwhelmed. Even I knew I was not Mozart; but as it turned out, I was not even Aaron Copland. So yes, there's a story in this.

I was at the end of my weekly session with Doc Holliday, when he turned from the piano and told me that I should orchestrate what he had just played. Why, I asked. So the Denver Symphony can play it tomorrow afternoon, he replied, which would give me a chance to hear my music. It would also give him a chance to hear it. He had made arrangements already, and all I needed to do was orchestrate six to ten measures. I told him I had never orchestrated anything. It was up to me, he said.

On the way home, I thought *what the hell*. Mozart wrote an entire opera overnight; I should be able to orchestrate a single movement that was already a piano score and not nearly so complex as *The Magic Flute*.

I bought paper, lots of paper. I stayed up all night trying to orchestrate the entire first movement. As I recall, I copied some twenty-five or thirty individual parts. This was not enough for the full orchestra to play, of course. And that explains why the orchestration sounded thinner than I expected. Basically, I was listening to a chamber group -- and I have not thought of that until writing this sentence right now. Well, that explains it, in part.

The rest is, I could not really hear what they were playing. This is because the conductor stopped the orchestra after the first chair trombone played a real clinker. From where I sat, it sounded like a donkey braying. The conductor must have agreed, because he set down his baton and looked at the score. Apparently, he did not immediately realize it was a "C" score, and that he needed to transpose before correcting the trombonist from B-natural to B-flat. Rather, he turned to face the audience and asked for "Mr. Gardner," stopped in mid-sentence, corrected himself, spoke with the trombonist, then raised his baton to begin again. I did not hear another note from that point. However, I did hear a remark from a violinist after the performance. He was speaking with another fiddler when he said: "It sounds like Copland played backwards."

I stopped writing music after that, except for a piece for four cellos begun and abandoned some years later. It was commended to a trashcan, together with the symphony and some other pieces or fragments -- cannot remember now.

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Yesterday was 4th of July. I barely noticed, because I was returning from Laos. The trip to Vientiane was my first, and I was there only five days. I did not buy a travel guide, nor did I do any preliminary study. I knew only that Vientiane is, of course, the capital city of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Laos; that Laos is possibly the most-bombed country on the planet (landmines are still scattered throughout); and that Laos had once been a French colony. Basically, then, I knew nothing. Further, I do not speak the Lao language. Although I can read the script some, thanks to its relation to Thai, I did not bother to read



any local newspaper (even one in English), and I had only superficial chats with local people. Clearly I am ready to write a book about Vientiane and to get on the lecture circuit.

I suppose I was expecting a communist state to be different. Olive uniforms with gold epaulets are everywhere in the city, but the officials are not officious. They are approachable, even helpful. The locals are unassuming, egalitarian, humorous, and hospitable. Even people hawking wares are far from obnoxious. The only person I saw with an obvious attitude was a guard at the US embassy. A guard at the Thai embassy pulled on his pants when we came through an open gate on a hot Monday morning. He looked like the night shift, waiting to be relieved of his post in a Graham Greene novel. This was unusual, because Thai officials are notoriously officious.

At first glance, the city is a shambles. The French colonial architecture is in disrepair; many buildings are closed. The main thoroughfare, broken asphalt and dirt, plods straight from the paved quay along the Mekong River to the Victory Gate, a roundabout with a triumphal arch that is the tallest structure in Vientiane. Around this circus, the thoroughfare branches into three pot-holed boulevards of asphalt and dirt. One has wide brick sidewalks. (Oddly, this sidewalk was festooned with road apples for three or four kilometers, but there were no carriages in sight and only a single smallish horse, munching grass along a footpath among the trees.)

Down two of these boulevards are numerous embassies and, surprisingly, many foreign banks and businesses whose buildings appear newly constructed; and there are numerous relief organizations throughout the city, especially a United Nations presence. Here the anomalies show. In a city where most people ride in trucks with benches, and where a motorcycle is a sign of relative affluence, there is a Mercedes-Benz dealership and a showroom for every Japanese company you can name. Who can afford this stuff? I did not see government officials driving luxury cars.

The Lao currency (kip, pronounced "keep") is practically worthless -- a cup of coffee is 50,000 kip or 1 US dollar at the airport -- but obviously big business is remaking Vientiane. What is driving the transformation? Laos has few natural resources and the country is land-locked. There are few sights to see (compared with other countries), and back-country treks are dangerous because of landmines -- so tourism cannot be the engine at this time. Yet construction projects are everywhere. A restaurant owner from France told me that the growth rate is down this year to about 10%, after several years at 20-40%. (His "Cote de Azure" on the quay is first class.)

Western language schools proliferate. A French colonial mansion has been renovated into a luxury hotel. A Buddhist monastery is now a state museum. The national library has a collection of perhaps 10,000 volumes -- but mostly in French, Vietnamese, Russian, and Chinese, not in Lao. The state-run bookstore is a souvenir shop (forgot to check prices on portraits of Lenin) with perhaps two hundred titles, mostly in Vietnamese and English. What appears once to have been a mammoth monastery compound is now a marketplace open until evening. There are many guesthouses for tight-budget travelers, most of whom are in their mid-twenties. On the quay or in the vicinity are many sidewalk eateries, internet shops, and beer gardens. A headline from a newspaper on a sidewalk table stated that the owner of a Las Vegas casino is opening a club in Vientiane. Across the street, in Lao, was a billboard warning about opium and heroin.

Lao labor is very cheap, so one day the investment in infra-structure will pay handsomely for joint venture capitalists willing to work with the government. Also, I think Vientiane is being transformed into an entertainment center for a different class of tourist

who will come later and bring big bucks -- or build vacation homes where they launder their money. But I could be wrong.

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Dennis Goeltl, an ancient friend, wrote me yesterday. His e-mail carried bad news. Our high school quarterback and good buddy, Dale Minnick, had both legs amputated mid-thigh. Dale has been on dialysis for two years, as a consequence of diabetes. Apparently Lynn, his wife did not show at the hospital, so Dale called police who found her sitting in a chair, dead from a heart attack. I almost imploded when I received this news. According to Dennis, Dale said he was "doing fine, under the circumstances." What could that possibly mean? I only know that I have not the gumption to face anything like that. How do people manage?

I was lying on the floor a few days back, staring at the ceiling. Dale crossed my mind. I was thinking that I should make contact, because we have had none for perhaps five years now. So there we have it. Now what to do. What to say.

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Today is the 27th of August. Just returned home after a lethargic session with the art history students. Walked. When I entered the door, it began to rain. It has rained little this season, until this past week, when it has rained nearly every day. Now, it is humid and hot as Dante's inferno.

Have not written for some time. Dale has since died. At one point he went into a coma, and his vital signs stopped, but doctors revived him. They did not know about the living will that barred extraordinary measures. When Dale revived, he learned that his hands would have to be removed. Also, he had lost sight in both eyes. Anyway, he's gone now. And Dennis, who wrote about it all, tells me that he has prostate cancer. Dennis has elected to try "seeds," or radioactive titanium pellets.

I have resigned from Yonok once again, effective the end of this term. There are no classes for me to teach next term, and it looks doubtful that the school will open painting classes next spring. Not enough students, and all are studying packaging design. Can't blame them. Painting is the road to ruin. Meanwhile, the international program, where I last taught, is closing the end of term -- yet, at the same time, Yonok is advertising for students and has signed a few. The right hand; the left hand -- neither knows what the other is doing. What's new? As for the English Department, I am not interested to return there. It's still a mess.

Started to paint again, just over a week ago. Have a new easel made from teak, a few brushes and some paints. Still no turpentine worth the name, nor any damar varnish. But it's good to be working again.

Meanwhile, it's a small world, thanks to the internet. Last week I learned that Stephen Brown, a friend from college, is now in the National Academy of Design. Has been since 1999. He also has won awards from the American Society of Arts & Letters. Found the information along with his portrait of Gregory Gillespie, who's work I was researching. What a surprise to learn about Stephen at the same time. Have not talked with him in perhaps seven or eight years.

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11 September 2002. Just received word that Editions Duang Kamol is publishing "Shrove Tuesday" and will try to have it in print before 13 October, the day of a big book fair in Bangkok.

My feeling is, I will pay for this. *Self-Portrait as Paul Gauguin*, a painting I did before coming to Thailand in 1990, will be the book's cover.

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I do not write regularly in this daybook, and I had forgot the frame of mind with which it started. I recall it now, though, after rereading the opening paragraph. It is more dejected than I feel now. Perhaps this is because I am painting again, for a month now, and that keeps me occupied when everything else makes little or no sense.

The other thought I had after reading the opening paragraph is that many of the people I consider friends are writers I have never met. It is a curious thing about writing, that it travels across time in this way. But it's only half a friendship. Who knows whether Joseph Conrad would like me as well as I like him. Or perhaps I would not like the man so well as I like the writer. Still, the two cannot be so easily separated.

Anyway, I have decided to change the opening paragraph and exchange angst for Stevie Smith's speaking voice, so to speak.

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The police have been cracking down on motorcyclists without helmets; so, last night, I was surprised to see an officer without a helmet riding a motorcycle. His helmet was in a basket at the front, and he was waiting for a red light to change. Other motorcyclists, kids who normally would have run the red light given the lack of cross-traffic, waited patiently, too. They had stopped behind him or slightly off to one side, and they were clearly discussing his headwear. It seemed this officer set a poor example in his blatant disregard for the rules he enforces. The idea occurred to me to notify his superiors, and I would have done, except his motorcycle was without a license plate.

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One has to admire Mr. Spencer's heartfelt self-criticism:

"The Republican form of government is the highest form of government: but because of this it requires the highest type of human nature, a type nowhere at present existing." – Herbert Spencer

Two more for the road:

Gibbon, on the 15th century pope, John XXIII: "The most scandalous charges were suppressed; the vicar of Christ was only accused of piracy, murder, rape, sodomy, and incest."

"Writing is turning one's worst moments into money." – JP Donleavy

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31 December, Tuesday. Soldiers and a bomb squad came to the village early this morning. They stayed until mid-afternoon, inside a cordon, four doors down from the house. A box was found, containing a device that experts identified as an old clock and miscellaneous paraphernalia, along with a note that read: "Next time it will be a real one."

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31 January 2003, Friday. This morning I received an e-mail from James Pruess, an editor with DK Books. They have published "Shrove Tuesday." Part One was written in 1991, and Part Two in 1995. It takes a while to get things done, sometimes. Meanwhile, I am writing the last chapter of "Ms. Stein." Will try to finish it today, just to make it a grand slam. Huzzah.

P.S. Finished Ms. Stein this afternoon. Not satisfied.

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I am recalling an incident from Fall Term 1969, when I entered a large auditorium for the first lecture in an introductory course in Natural Science. The avuncular professor produced a large, framed oil painting, done by his daughter. It was a three-quarter view of a hirsute ape-man of thoughtful demeanor. "From our collection of family portraits," the professor said. "Neanderthal side."

I raised my hand. Now, I have to tell you, I still don't know why – especially in a class of some 150 students. The professor was noticeably surprised to see a hand, but he opened the floor all the same. I asked him whether there was any evidence that Neanderthals actually looked anything like that portrait. He admitted there was not, then asked: "Are you a Mormon, or something?"

I replied: "Well, I have studied with the Mormons..." And he interrupted to say, "Well, there it is." Of course, the audience began to laugh, and that was the end of the exchange. As he had the microphone, he continued in the same vein. At the end of the lecture, I went to the Registrar's office and dropped the class. From then on, I read natural science alone.

Now, had the professor been a little more patient, he might have learned that I had rejected Mormonism (I had studied at the request of an uncle who was highly placed in that group). The professor might also have learned that I believed in the theory of evolution. What he missed most of all was that I had registered for a science class.

Now, all these years later, I am wondering what would have happened had I not raised my hand. It's conceivable that other students might have come away with an impression that the portrait was based upon real knowledge.

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It's Sunday morning and there's nothing to say, so it seems a good time to write because there's nothing quite like nothing. In moments like this I like to recall Jasper Rich, Grandpa Gardner's uncle who kept a diary comprised of the daily entry, "Nothing." What's interesting is that he took the time and trouble every day to write that word. I imagine he derived some small satisfaction from doing it, from knowing it might poke a finger in the eye of whoever found the diary upon his death or be a form of immortality insofar as his descendants or relatives would mention it from time to time. To that extent, I suppose I

have played right into his hands, or made myself absolutely essential to Uncle Jasper's private joke. (It just occurred to me that, here, we may have the opening paragraph to a novel. Of course, names would be changed; and a writer would have to come up with some sort of story to follow it; perhaps a story with a plot. But these are only details.)

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23 May 2003. What brave journalists and what scathing criticism, as the New York Times finally wakes up and yawns. This morning, there was an attachment to my email, an article called "Dancing with the Devil."

What a surprise that, in the latest example, Halliburton and its subsidiary, Kellogg Brown & Root, won the "emergency" no-bid contracts for Iraq. Now we can see that, not only are the interests of these companies identical to the public interest, this is the free market at work.

Welcome to the New World Order, in which CEOs and NGOs know what is best for all. The old, slow, cumbersome democratic forms are passing. Anything that impedes the push-button flow of megabucks from New York to Tokyo to London to numbered off-shore accounts is in process of elimination. This includes the Bill of Rights, if the Dixie Chicks are any indication. It will prove true for anyone who does not take the market as a first principle, the be-all and end-all of existence.

Y'all have a good time, y'heah? An' remembuh... down heah in Texas, we like ta say "Dance with the one that brung ya."

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My friend Howard Goldman has been writing and complaining about parents and coaches at his sons' baseball games in Maumee, Ohio. So I had to answer:

This was the second time in a week that you mentioned Little League. I gather that there is discontent in the south stands. Well, at least someone is there to be discontented. My dad never came to my baseball games, although he did present me with a genuine leather Spaulding "autograph" Warren Spahn Special. I used it to cover my face in protection from a line drive to second base, where I took up space. The beeline to my brow got snagged in the web pocket and stuck there, but the force of the drive knocked me down. Yup, I fell upon the runner from first, thereby making the only single-player double-play in the history of North Redondo Beach Little League Baseball. That same game, I scored four runs in a single inning, by taking bases on balls as the opposing pitcher walked 32 additional batters (no 10-run rule back then). I believe that if no one on my team had taken a swing, we would still be in the bottom of the fourth inning, with the opposing Manager yelling to his 53 years-old son: "Pull your game together, Mario!" The echo from our dugout was: "Yeah Mario, pull it together!"

What I remember best about baseball was the aging process. I was 10 years and 6 months when I first suited up. The Manager needed to fulfill some mysterious quota, and so told me that I was close enough to be "really 12," which made my 'baseball age' 13. I went from 10 to 13 in as many seconds, and was the only player to make such a leap. Naturally, I played very little – even in practice. No wonder George Hardlicker fanned me with three fast balls in my only outing as a pinch hitter. It was embarrassing. He was

popping Flee double bubble the whole time. The pink globe would burst and here would come the pitch, right down the pike. But my swing was a day late. I had never before seen such speed. Of course, as the gods will, that was the one time my step-Grandfather came to see me play. On better days, he and I listened to LA Dodgers radiocasts after the races from Santa Anita.

Do you know, I don't believe I ever got a hit in two years. When I switched to basketball and flag football, I did better. In high school, I only played football and did not get along well at all with the coaches. An American boyhood, to be sure.

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10 December 2003

Versions of personal history will vary, as in what I wrote some weeks later to my father:

Your last letter asked whether Glen, Debra, Darlene, and whoever else might be annoyed with you still. I think so, but I do not know for certain. Glen sometimes asks if I have heard from you, as does Julie. Lisa never says a word – but then, I seldom see or talk with her. We really do not know each other. Sometimes Aaron asks about you, but he and I are only sometime-communicants. I think I last heard from him in August or September. I told him to make contact with you, but I doubt he will do it. He seems shy in many ways, like me. Besides which, he is studying full-time and working full-time. That's a load, as I recall.

Why everyone is annoyed, I do not know exactly. It has never been clearly stated, perhaps because I have been away so many years. But it has something to do with whatever happened right after Zelma died, when everyone came to the house, and it involves Lisa. So it happened after I returned to Colorado, to continue work on the murals at Rialto Theatre. When I have discussed with Glen why he does not talk to you -- say, when we are working together in the garage during one of my stays in Colorado – he is not at all annoyed, but he usually says “Enough is enough.” The most explanation I have got from him is that whatever you said or did to Lisa was the last straw. He has never said what it is, nor has anyone else.

Actually, if you really care to know, I have spoken with Darlene, Debra, and Glen more than once about this. My line goes something like this: Yes, enough is enough – so why not forget about it and make contact. I tend to remind them that you and I wasted a number of years not speaking to each other, that you and I still torque one another, but that no matter what, you are still Dad. The three of them nod their heads but still do nothing. To that extent, it seems to be ancient history – except that no one wants a repeat. That's why they stay away, and that's all I know and all I can tell you. Sorry it is not more helpful.

These days, it all seems sad-but-funny to me, because they were close to you for all those years when you and I could not be in the same room together. On my side, most of the disagreements between you and me seem unimportant now, when stacked against the fact that life is short. Besides, you were right in some things about which I thought you were wrong. And I also know that we misunderstood each other. And I also never really asked why you thought what you thought. I suppose this perspective is called experience, and it has taught me that I never really sat down to ask about your experiences.

I have some interesting memories of you. I am talking about when I was a boy. You may be surprised to hear that some of these involve your patience with me. You were strict without being over-bearing, and you never embarrassed me in front of friends – although you rightly made me correct a lie once, about white horses on your ranch in

Texas. I was bragging about you to a neighborhood kid, but you made me set the record straight.

On the other hand, you seemed to disapprove of my interests – whether it was baseball, or painting, or anything else. At the same time, you brought me a paint box and a baseball glove. Did you ever come to a game? Did you know that I caught a pass in the midst of heavy traffic, in the end-zone, as time ran out, to beat the best team in our division? We were the next-to-worst team in North Redondo Beach Flag Football

Or did you know that I scored 17 points against mighty Berle Junior High, playing only in the second half, while Paul Westphal scored a measly 11 points playing the whole game? Well, Paul was probably triple-teamed. Did you know that my high school football coach beat me up in the locker room for something done by someone else? Or that the same coach made me carry the ball 15 times up the middle, in succession, until the linebackers knocked me unconscious? One of the linebackers was my good friend, Dale Minnick. He was just doing his job. He died last year from diabetes, after his legs had been amputated, his hands were up next, and he was losing his eyes. I think about him often. He gave me his sister's recording of Miles Davis and Gil Evans' Porgy & Bess.

So Dale and I were coming from the barbershop one Saturday morning, and he said to me: "My sister married a nigger." I shrugged and said "So?" Then he shrugged. Relaxed, we walked to his house, he introduced me to Frank, and the three of us went over the backyard fence into the park and played football. It was a great morning. Frank was a halfback with a big university team, I do not remember which school. Dale was in the first year of a scholarship to quarterback at a small college. He had a strong arm. Anyway, Frank and Suzie are still married after 35 years. Dale and I visited them once in Denver, but they have lived in Houston since around 1970 and I would not know them if I saw them now.

I cannot remember telling you this, so maybe I had better now. The car you built for the Cub Scout Pinewood Derby cleaned everybody. I mean, even when it went against the previous year's championship vehicle, it wasn't even close. Well, our team had the technology – shaved nails for axles and graphite lubrication. That's some slick shit. Maybe the trophy got lost in the move to Colorado, I don't know.

But I do know why you wanted me to learn a trade. With a trade, one can travel – and that's a form of freedom. Another form of freedom is being able to tell a boss how many times to fold it and where to stick it. I did not understand that then. I have come to understand this since living in Thailand, which has a strong class system. You mentioned "class" to me, but it was the 60s and you remember how things were. Now I know that we belonged to a particular class. Today, I do not know whether my ignorance was bliss. Certainly it kept me from knowing my place, and now it is too late. Maybe that is another form of freedom. So it seems to me now that you and I had the same aim, just different routes. Whose route was more practical? Well, you will win that argument every time.

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10 March 2004

These days, I am in physical therapy twice each week. I made a visit this morning, in fact, and had an opportunity to watch a young woman whom I have watched a number of years now. When I began this current course of treatment, she worked on me the first six sessions. Then came an unwelcome change, because the staff rotates responsibilities. The

fellow who works on me now is skilled and likeable, but I have lately seen little of Bua-riem.

This morning, however, she worked on a paraplegic stretched out next to me. In perhaps five years, this was the first unobstructed view I have ever had of Bua-riem. Thanks to logistics, there was no need for the usual discrete glances of Thai society. Still, given favorable logistics, one does not stare because it is rude.

Of course, she knows that I watch her. I once told her so and apologized for being a painter. She smiled and said it was natural for painters to be observers. Then I spoke of physical proportions and the differences between Westerners and Thais, and that Thais are easily the more graceful – indirect compliments being best. We then talked about other things, nothing serious, including that my son is three years older than she is but cannot speak Thai. What I did not say is would that he could, and she is the reason.

You are thinking that I am in love with this young woman. Not quite. It's appreciation of her presence in the world, as one might appreciate a sunrise or Mozart. She is lovely, certainly, and without pretense. But it has also something to do with mood, gestures, capable hands, hair that is sometimes pulled back in a horse (not pony) tail, a voice that's a running brook, well-turned ankles, the way she comes and goes, is twenty-seven and unmarried and lives alone. On weekends, she returns to her parents' house. Such a creature seems impossible anymore, even

here, yet there she is, in all her quietly unassuming self-possession. If I had to find a single word for her, it would be graceful. I cannot recall the last time I saw anyone graceful at home in the States. Certainly I am graceless. Here, there are many graceful people, but often it is a form of theatre. In the case of Bua-riem, it is simply how she is in the world.

I don't know. Perhaps this is one reason I have been despondent these past few months. I know if anything happens to Janjira, I would never find anyone like her – or, for that matter, like Bua-riem. I am too old. There is not just a yawning gulf of time to be reckoned. There is the absence of any future.

I find it odd to be thinking in this way. I suspect this realization is what has happened more than anything this past year – more than wasted opportunities; more than astigmatic eyes, arthritic joints, bad back, and sore knees; more than hyper-pigmentation, moles, pattern baldness, allergies, and dyspepsia. I know longer see any future. I suppose this means I no longer hope for anything.

I want to be 34 again, that's what, and then Janjira would be 26, and we would steal away and make a world. Now, we are just trying to make it through this one.

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Francois's severed arm. That happened during my third or fourth year here. There was an accident involving a touring bus and the victims were taken to Lampang Hospital. I can no longer recall how many were injured or killed. As often happens, the driver fled the scene.

It was at night, and I was called to the emergency room. I suppose someone thought I might be able to help with translation. But the bed to which I was directed supported a man who was crying out, "You cannot do this to me. I am French!" I do not speak French, and although he was yelling in French, I understood what he was saying. Now, I do not know how. Maybe it was because I used to speak a little Spanish.

Two nurses whom I did not know recognized me because I am married to Janjira. One of the nurses said to me: "He's been like this for three hours, ever since the surgery. He will pull off his arm, if..." She whispered this, mixing English and Thai.



The man appeared to be in his early thirties. His left arm had been reattached. He was delirious, and he was fighting the restraints securing him, fighting the nurses treating him, and fighting the friends standing beside his bed.

One of these friends was a woman with tired blonde hair pulled back severely and a purse slung over her shoulder. She saw me, walked over and in English said: "Can you do something? Francois is crazy. Well, he's a record producer. We can't do anything. Maybe you can explain to him..."

"I'm sorry. I do not speak French."

"Francois can speak English. Please."

I looked around the ward. The other patients were clearly disturbed by Francois's screaming. The nurses looked embarrassed and helpless. The friends around the bed appeared haggard and at wit's end. And Francois's shoulder was a gaping wound, open and raw, with his arm attached by tenuous tendons and thread-like veins and supported by a flimsy stainless steel contraption standing indifferently alongside, as if it might tip over any second and take the arm with it. Or at least that was my perception.

I did not know what to do.

"Please," the woman said again and turned away, back to the bed.

I remember standing there, watching the scene as from a great distance. And I remember that I did not have a clue.

What I remember also is that I prayed silently. I did not make any gesture, or raise my eyes to heaven as actors do in Hollywood's biblical epics, or even close them. And the prayer was short. It was something like "God of Israel do something." Or perhaps it was "Help me please, Jehovah, I don't know what to do." It cannot have been more than that.

The rest is a blur. All I know is that I remained where I stood and spoke out. I remember calling his name, twice. I remember that the sound of my voice was strange in my ears. It was firm and commanding. And I remember saying only two short sentences.

Francois responded to the voice. He immediately fell silent and the woman who had asked for my help turned, visibly relieved, and said thank you to me.

Maybe I nodded in reply. I cannot remember rightly. I remember that the nurses were staring at me, and I began to feel embarrassed. I turned and walked out from the ward, to get out of there before he again started screaming.

When Janjira returned home from work the following day, she said: "What did you say to that man? All the nurses are talking about this. They cannot believe it. He did not make another sound after you spoke to him."

I remember shrugging. What did I say to him? I'm still not sure. Even now I sometimes wonder about it.

Perhaps the following day I asked: "How is he?"

Janjira said the wound had been too dirty and could not be cleaned completely, and so Francois had lost his arm. He was returning to France.

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Two letters to painter William Napier:

Bill –

Janjira printed your letter for me, and so I will read it when she returns home from visiting her youngest sister who is visiting from Bangkok. By cell phone, I asked her (Janjira, that is) to check email. It sounds so third world postmodern, except we have no water flowing

through the pipes to our house. That condition is authentic third world post-postmodern, but I digress. She and her sister, Parichat, and her husband Yai (a good man), are at Mom & Dad's house. Parichat and Yai bought an air conditioner for Dad's room. Meanwhile I am here at home, more or less, and lighter by a third of a bottle of cheap gin. It's been a long swelter of a day.

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Okay, she returned home, brought the printout, and I have read it twice. I need to read it again and to think about it. I feel this will be a protracted discussion. It will take time and effort to get to the heart of the matter. More to follow.

JG

P.S. Here's more. Read your letter again this morning. Here we go:

Have I been withholding anything, all these years? I don't think so. As with other Americans such as you describe, technique and effort impress me. Consequently, this aspect of your painting impresses me. But in the end it is a superficial aspect, because effort and technique are the means to an end, which is the realization of an idea (thought, feeling, intuition). One cannot make a general statement about a body of work based solely upon a single painting – or even a handful; and it takes time to see a body of work. So, I have been watching your less than prolific production for many years. (Don't forget I've been away a lot.) Time has shown that the painting with the letter and bullet is an isolated example. To me, it makes your other paintings appear dry and detached. I did not realize that until I nearly punched a hole through the mural – because I am dissatisfied with its technique and its pointlessness. On the other hand, some days the mural seems all right.

Do I have the perception that others have been withholding something from me all these years? Yes, of course.

You wrote: "You paint ideas, I paint things." I am unsure how to respond to that, and my first thought is that sometimes a cigar is a cigar (but a good woman is a smoke). What I mean is, I too paint objects but I am aware that my eye and hand are a filter, a point of view, a bias – and so I let that happen, just as my paintings tend to show the process of painting, from the ground up.

You made me smile: "I liken your head to a vast library without a particularly disciplined research staff." I may have to appropriate (swipe) that somewhere. Well, I admit that some of the volumes are strewn across various tables and study nooks, some are on the floor, and many may have been shelved wrongly. The staff, however, is far more disciplined than you suppose. The difficulty is, they are using a different system of classification. This is because they do not share the usual assumptions. To someone using the standard system, this can be disorienting. Your turn.

Dear Bill –

Thought to write while waiting for sunlight to enter the studio so the daubing of the day can begin. I seem to be answering your email by installment. This morning I want to

discuss your commission to paint a 'brave' picture. Most of the staff of the cranial library has clocked in, so let's get down to it.

You are right about my tidy palette. On the other hand, I often fling, drip, and splash paint. How to explain this incongruity? How again, asked Felix by way of comparison, can an Oscar such as your self be fearful of flipping paint at a fucking canvas?

Take "Ideology" or "Hermeneutics" (please + rim-shot) now showing in Sandra Phillips' basement. These paintings appear to incorporate aleatoric technique (a favorite oxymoron). Well, yes and no. Unless one gets it right a premier coup, it takes time to render what may appear to be merely a matter of chance. Scratches, splatters, and spills are afforded careful consideration. A gestural brushstroke may have been painted a dozen times, until it has the characteristics and visual weight that I want. Sounds rather less than God forming something from nothing; even less than the heroics of the New York School. But as I said last time, in this library the system of classification is different, and an artist (being human) is a maker not a creator.

Felix has implied that your palette is at odds with your tidy paintings on panel, and he be wrong. In your case I suspect that preparing a palette is really deliberation, a mental preparation like stretching before cycling. At other times, it's a means to pull the brakes. You would paint when the muse comes to call, if only you did not first have to clean your palette.

There's much to be said for deliberation. "Arnolfini Wedding" may be the best painting ever done. BUT there is a great deal of the painter in that painting, feeling and thought, symbols and technique. Not that it bears comparison with Van Eyck, but you have done at least one painting into which you poured those four things. Many of us do not manage even that much.

This brings us to your commission to do a 'brave' painting when you can't even start the Goldberg Variations. In the first case, should you dislike the brave painting in the end, you could paint it out. Here I am, telling this to a guy who otherwise lives like Gulley Jimson. Need you show it to anyone, even the donor? In the second case, you would be letting J.S. Bach provide the form or structure that many a closet Platonist is afraid to let go.

I really doubt that you approached your crayons and coloring books the same way you are approaching your oil colors and panels. I am not talking about the visual language learned along the way, but the low wire with safety net.

I will count this message successful if you are irritated enough to begin preparing 32 small panels.

JG

P.S. There is another side to deliberation. I spent nearly nine hours, yesterday, writing the above message. I wrote and rewrote paragraphs, deleted others, moved things around, recast sentences... recast thoughts. What a waste of time, because for everything I thought or said, there are historical examples to prove those things wrong. Whatever criticism I sent your way was really a projection of my own dissatisfaction with a particular project.

The part of you that is in every one of your paintings is the steady gaze, the meditation. For some that will be enough, for others not. As for being unproductive, how productive was Vermeer? In 1972 alone I painted almost twice the number he did in his entire lifetime. Of course, there may have been a slight difference in quality, tipping the scales in my favor.

It occurs to me that these considerations are all historical in nature. I suppose that, like every other person who has picked up a brush, I would like to make a contribution and to be remembered. It is also true that this concern is not the reason I first started painting. In fact, all such considerations are so much baggage accumulated along the way but unnecessary to making the journey (and undeserving of a fresh metaphor).

As for single-mindedness of purpose, what to say? In my case, it comes and goes. I can turn out 19 canvases in two months, then paint nothing for two years. It all depends on whether I have anything to say. I doubt you are much different. As for painting the 'brave' painting, there is also the bravery of stubbornness and the courage of one's convictions. If it isn't you, for whatever cause, don't do it.

Odd, but I am looking forward to the day's painting. There is almost enough light. Now, I need to make a decision. Do I want to paint, or would I rather write more nonsense to you?

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Defining natural bounds is an interesting question. Are there any? If there are bounds, are they merely physical limitations? Clearly, we are subject to the law of gravity, a physical limitation, unless we are in a vacuum chamber. So then gravity, as a physical limitation, has a limit -- or it is conditional; or it has an exception; or, at the very least, it may be suspended.

Let's take a wide turn and suppose that whatever humans do is natural. Is there anything unnatural about making a vacuum chamber? Who would say yes? The answer must be no, given the assumption that everything humans do is natural. Where the answer is no, it is natural that humans can suspend, if not deny, natural limitations. Otherwise, one must argue that, in some sense at least, humans live outside nature -- and that appears to be *prima facie* nonsense. It's no doubt more sensible, acceptable, and less cluttered to suppose that whatever humans do is natural.

Given that, one natural phenomenon is transsexual surgery. It's natural because it is something humans do. As with gravity and vacuum chambers, being male or female is not (any longer, at least) for humans a natural limitation. Sex itself (that is, having male or female organs) is merely limited by surgical technique, and so human sexual bounds (gender, one supposes) are entirely determined by cultural and economic factors such as local taboo and the ability to pay.

Surely any boundary upon sexual desire is cultural and has nothing to do with anything 'natural' or 'unnatural'. The boundaries appear to be arbitrary and vary from culture to culture. (Perhaps the scientific research of Margaret Mead can be of help here, for those who have yet to become acquainted with her subjects' revisionist views.) Might not one ask why there need be any boundary at all? Still, Elton John once remarked that the line proscribing human sexual activity should be drawn at goats. This odd and highly reactionary view appears to suggest that humans have sexual boundaries. But do we? It is

no secret that conquistadors fucked llamas in South America (this spread syphilis carried by llamas which, one supposes, should have practiced safe sex). Obviously then, if some soldiers found llamas attractive, that's natural for them – and who is Elton John to suggest otherwise? Yet again, perhaps Elton John has not the temperament of a conquistador. I mean to suggest that it is natural for him to draw the line at goats.

On the other hand, I know of no case where a llama sought sex with a conquistador. It is doubtful that llamas have any cultural taboo in respect of bestiality, and it is doubtful that every llama has the same temperament; so perhaps it is not in the general nature of a llama to cross the line proposed by Elton John. They seem to agree with him, only with the proscription reversed. Otherwise, in the absence of such a taboo, one must ask whether a llama is bounded or limited in some way that a conquistador is not? Then again, must whatever is true for llamas also apply to conquistadors?

Upon reflection, there is a logical fallacy above, because llamas are not goats and there may be different behaviors and expectations from one species to another. After all, everything is relative. Further, we might also discuss possible differences between conquistadors and humans. Or, as Rorty might suggest, it may be that we need to consider terms more carefully; that is, what is human and what is inhuman, and how those terms are freighted. Who wants to suggest, much less assert, that a conquistador anywhere ever behaved in an inhuman manner or that Elton John's line is anything more than a culturally determined taboo?

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Once, on a weekend visit to my father's house, he showed me some treasures in the bottom drawer of a dresser in his bedroom. Among other things, there was an officer's sidearm, a red armband with a white circle and black swastika, and, most impressive of all to me, a weighty knife with a florid inscription in German. My father told me it read "This is my Irene," which he said meant "my ideal." I was too young to understand even that, so he then told me it was an example of twisted values and not a word more. Well, you can see that I remember what he told me. I sometimes wonder if he hoped that I might.

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Someone threw food in the cafeteria of Madison Elementary. Mr. Singer saw it and announced that no one would be released for midday recess until the culprit came forward. Two other teachers, women, looked doubtful, but Mr. Singer was adamant. He stood with his arms folded and feet spread. He stood in the center of the room. He repeated his warning, "All right, we'll just stay in here, then..." as the minutes ticked away.

No one came forward. All eyes were on the clock's large hand, moving inexorably to the top of the hour and the resumption of studies. Meanwhile the playground, equal shares of asphalt and dirt, spread wide under a blue sky through an open double door.

I was sitting across the room from where the food hit the floor. As a matter of trajectory, I suppose I could not possibly have thrown it. But I watched the clock, heard the murmurs of those seated next to me, saw the heads drawn close together at tables across the room, searched the worried faces of the two teachers for whom it was incumbent to support Mr. Singer. And I raised my hand. "What are you doing?" said the boy next to me.

Mr. Singer turned, and he may have looked surprised. He asked: "Did you do it?" I said yes. He hesitated, told me to come forward, and then excused everyone else for recess.

He questioned me. I do not remember the questions, really, but I do remember saying that it was unfair to keep everyone – so he must have asked me why I lied. The interesting thing is that I remember feeling as if the world was crashing down around me, feeling miserably choked, and that I almost felt guilty for having thrown the food. It did not at all occur to me that raising my hand was a lie, however temporary. That was not the main thing. I only recall that, when Mr. Singer released me, there were still ten minutes of freedom.

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At the same school, was a Canadian drill sergeant who was a naturalized flag-waving American. He wore mismatched suits and was my teacher in sixth grade, and he noticed that I and one other kid were collecting editorial cartoons, particularly those by Herbert Block and another artist whose name I cannot recall. So, the patriotic Mr. E brought comic books for us to read. I was too young to recognize blatant Cold War propaganda, nor did I understand the aftermath of the McCarthy Hearings, so the comics impressed me greatly. I mean, they were really neat. He also taught us old marching songs.

Sometime in the middle of the school year, Mr. E knocked on my mother's front door. At the time, she was thirty-two with four kids and a job at North American Aviation. So there he stood, under the porch light, carrying a worn leather suitcase. He removed his hat, smiled broadly and stepped in. Seated, he opened the suitcase and pulled out gild-edged volumes of the Encyclopedia Americana, profusely illustrated. They were spanking new with an aroma much like the air inside a new automobile. He turned to the entry "Painting" and asked me to read a paragraph. Then he told me to read a similar paragraph from the Britannica, and to decide whether the two paragraphs said the same thing and which was easier to read. Well, that was two seconds' work. The illustrations were beautiful and the Americana won hands down. Then came the sales pitch and perhaps an hour later my tired mother was putting her name on the dotted line. I did not understand that we could not afford it, but Mom always found a way. It's also true that I spent many hours with those books, so perhaps it was a good investment. When I was not reading or browsing, I often ran my hand along the spines as the set sat on the shelf. My sisters and brother used them, too, when they had to write reports for school.

A year later I was attending a different school, while my next younger sister was still at the elementary school. One day she said that Mr. E had been released, because it came out that he had abused one of his students sexually, an eleven-year old girl.

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Oh, mares eat oats and does eat oats and little lambs eat ivy, a kid'll eat ivy too, wouldn't you? The trick, at 5:30 in the morning, is to get down the first sentence. Then, to refill one's coffee cup. I'll be right back.

All right. Now that my peepers are open, I will tell you that, when my mother sang that silly song, really not so many years ago, I thought the words were: 'maresy dotes and dozy dotes and little lamsie divey, a kiddie-ee divey two, wooden ewe' – something James Joyce might have written. This goes a long way to help explain how I ended up here.

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[Here's one for the books, so to speak. Everyone who, like me, pretends to be a writer has ideas, sketches, pages upon pages, even complete manuscripts that will be abandoned or consigned to well-deserved oblivion. Here is one, the opening to what I thought could be an inventive novel.

The idea was to tell the Beowulf legend from the monster's point of view, or something like that, because John Gardner got there first. So instead, it was to be derived from the Book of Giants found among the Dead Sea Scrolls and told from the point of view of one of the Nephilim, that group of rather large offspring of angels who forsook their proper place. By and by, the reader would discover that the narrator is one of those angels, lately re-materialized, and perhaps the father of Gilgamesh who figures in the aforementioned scroll.

Well, I said it was a lousy idea. An ideal reader, however, might find it interesting, only it should be forgot who is the narrator. We don't want the cat out of the bag. Here goes:]

You want to know how all this happened? We could start anywhere. Yesterday, for example, was one of those days that happen now and again. You know what I mean, the kind of day that makes one think about things.

In any other circumstances, thirty-five would not be a number to be dreaded. It might not even bring one to contemplation, much less circumspection. Without well wishes and accompanying cards, it would be like any other day of gift offerings as one might make to a household god. Besides, there were lots and lots of presents.

There was an Advantage Organizer, a real leather-bound binder with zipped side pouch and brightly colored plasticine tabs, all alphabetized, that separated the compact portfolio sections labeled Diary, Projects, Goals, Expenses, and Communications.

But upon closer inspection, these neat classifications appeared to overlap. Projects, for example, was subdivided into Target, Start, Finish, Idea, Plan, Summary, and Necessary Resources. Then, Necessary Resources was subdivided to include Budget, Materials, Expenses, and People.

What might one make of that? People were still listed under necessary resources, yet listed last. Meanwhile, the duplication, replication, and/or reiteration of Expenses is never too much emphasized.

Ah, you noticed something. Diary, Projects, Goals, Expenses, and Communications are not in alphabetical order, whereas the plasticine tabs were called 'alphabetized.' You are quite right, the point is conceded, and so there is no cause to gainsay anyone's reliability here. So relax, sit back and light, pour, or snort yourself another one. Shoot yourself, if you like. Ah, me.

Why not think of this explanation as a communication like a diary. How's that for a summary? By now you must have some idea about who could be the target. And although the genesis of the project and its goals may remain unclear, these nevertheless imply a plan. Now that's rationality. Hence the popular choice between cold comfort and Southern.

All right. Instead, let's start with something we might have in common.

Everyone likes to watch. God knows, there are so many things to see. Nevertheless, points of view vary, and because everything is relative not all would agree that the daughters of men, to turn an old phrase, are good-looking. Still, that fact can explain a thing or two, and it definitely relates to materials. True, materials are not now what they used to be, but that's no reason not to try.

Oh, a double negative. I admit, it gives me a rush. But perhaps you are not one who does not dislike double negatives? When you hear one, does not the ground beneath your feet begin not to feel unreliably unstable? Odd, would you not disagree, that two negatives make a positive, excepting the square root of minus-one, but two wrongs do not make a right? Then again, this is the stuff of semiotics, qualitative differences, revenge plays and, most usefully, practical philosophies. Well, anyone can see there is no small talk with you.

My friends call me Le Zaza even though before Miss Gabor was, I am. Anyway, call me Zaza. No, it's not the tetragrammaton. In fairness, not all signs signify and some are done with mirrors. Where were we?

Four letters, four directions, four seasons, four spices (parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme in the canticle, Scarborough Fair), four governors, four gospels, and four assassinations – a thirty-fifth birthday had brought this body to the obsessive numerology of a cabalist. And because four is twice two, there were certain implications. For example, thirty-five is twice seventeen and one-half, the age this body graduated from high school; while twice thirty-five is the three-score-and-ten of an allotted span. Yes, one might seek the means to beat that rap, and by now you may have guessed that it would have little to do with exercise, fasting, green juices, and regular coffee enemas.

[OKAY, enough. You can see it belongs in the trash. I mean, Le Zaza – Azazel backwards, for crying out loud.]

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30 May – Last night I received a telephone call from Jack and Binh Rybacki. Jack mentioned the Bush Administration's 'Patriot Act' policy of 'Homeland Security' which, to me, sounds like something Nazis could have formulated. I think neo-conservatives have the excuse they have been seeking for years, thanks to the attack on the World Trade Center. Still, if it were not that little event, it would be something else, for such has been the trend since the McCarthy hearings in the 1950s. This means to say that I think the United States has flirted with becoming a police state for a long time.

Digital technology has made it easier than ever. Privacy is over and, frankly, individual freedom is on the way out. One hopes that pockets of resistance remain, but from here it is hard to tell. Everyone seems afraid of the bully on the block. It's really sad. America was, for a time, a place where dissenters and non-conformists had room to breathe, but that time appears to be passing, all in the name of national security and loyalty as defined by the Bush cabal (who stole an election in Florida, as I recall). Never mind, if worse comes to worst, Americans can still buy reproductions of Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" printed in China and suitable for framing.

Dave Winkler recently sent me an article from The New Yorker, about the interrogations in Iraq. I had missed most of this entertainment, because I no longer read newspapers or watch television. Americans must be swallowing daily doses of rationalization served up by pundits, spin-doctors, and analysts. Well, if The New Yorker piece is anywhere near the truth, Rumsfeld and Cambone should be tried as war criminals at The Hague. Of course, that will never happen. Instead, the guards from Maryland, who were only following orders (the Nuremberg defense of lackeys and goons), will be subjected to internal review and perhaps court martial, if the 'legal knot' of 'immunity' arising from 'participation' in 'black ops' can be 'untangled.' Words, words, words. Any way you care to slice it, this is the best thing to happen to talk-radio since Monica



Lewinsky. Whether anyone 'is' now 'in violation' of the Geneva Conventions will depend upon what your definition of 'is' is.

What sham and shame. Last year, I wanted to come home. This year, I do not know where is home, but I must return to Colorado owing to the mural project. I can not say that I am looking forward to it, although, at the very least, I would like to see family and friends at least one more time, since the days are getting shorter and I no longer take many things for granted.

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A friend wrote... "I remember reading William Blake in high school, 'Why must a poem mean, but be?' I have thought about that for all these years and I am just starting to see some meaning to it? (That was supposed to be funny)."

As a Philistine, I mostly do not care for poetry. Tropes, its stock in trade, are basically irrational. I mean, the moon is neither a cookie nor a galleon tossed upon cloudy seas. Nor does jocund day stand tippy-toe on the misty mountain top. Such comparisons, however, are supposed to lead our higher sensibilities to higher truths. For convenience, let's call these 'meta-truths.' As a meta-truth is virtual, let's abbreviate and call it MTV. Your basic MTV mode is to sling images as James Joyce slung words. As you can see from Joyce to Milton to Homer, bards are supposed to be blind. As irony and/or paradox would have it, this means they are seers. Breadth of vision makes our seer an oracle. And that's the name of the game, to find all the world in a blade of grass. By blade, the poet means to say fractals, Old French, and quantum mechanics, not to forget every baseball statistic you've ever stored. So I guess I am saying that poetry is a form of priest-craft, although Mr. Bly would probably prefer 'shaman' over 'priest.'

What complicates things is that poets are not always wrong. Quite a good one wrote 'Words, words, words' (for sixpence a line I could cause a riot in a nunnery). Words can do wonders – 'Life, forbye, is but the Michaelmas preceeding our own particular gallows (what a wonderful thing is metaphor)." Because a wonder is something outside the usual order of things, I think one job of poetry is to turn meaning inside out – hence, all that icy fire and such questions as Billy Blake's. All he did was bend grammar, the logic of the language. But, as any MTV maven will tell you, all those fleeting images must signify something. Well duhhh, of course they do. They signify that someone's got the maven's number.

Meanwhile, the vapy koobs devastated the sitar molently. This time we followed the logic of the language, so what was that again? Words, words, words... had we but world enough and time, the Blakester's rhyming were no crime.

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Dave Winkler sent an article from the New York Times that piqued my curiosity. It is about 'Fahrenheit 9-11'. I do not know filmmaker Michael Moore and cannot place his name, although somehow it is familiar. It is possible that this documentary will come here, but it would be months from now because Thai subtitles have to be added. In the process, the film may lose timeliness. On the other hand, probably not. The article is talking about a pattern of behavior and a long train of events. Besides, by the time it arrives, other voices will have chimed in, the debate will be far along, presumably all evidence will come

out, and then someone like myself might see the film with an attitude more closely approximating objectivity (I'm smiling while typing).

After everything I have learned about the Bush family in the past three years, my concern is that Moore might go 'over the top' as Oliver Stone did in 'JFK'. Maybe that is the closest and best example for comparison. From what I have studied, I am in basic agreement with Stone. But he made a tactical error. Even if he is correct that a dozen weapons were pointed at JFK, he should have trimmed it down to two or three – the number needed to explain the agonized turnings of the magic bullet. As no one really recalls Oswald himself – "I'm just a patsy" – in the end, and in part because of Stone's excessiveness, any explanation involving a conspiracy is denigrated. I hope Moore does not make a similar mistake. It is not helpful to overstate facts.

Of course, if you're me, you are never sure whether someone like Stone is in the employ of the CIA or someone else. That is, maybe he was hired to make a movie that was over the top, to discredit conspiracy generally. But in his case, I doubt it. I have been watching his movies for 25 years.

Earlier this week, I saw 'The Human Stain' with Hopkins and Kidman and other fine actors. I think the adaptation and direction are very good, and that Phillip Roth has a finger on a pulse. What I do not understand is that none of my stateside movie-going friends ever mentioned the film at all. Did no one see it or like it?

Nor did anyone ever mention 'The Quiet American' from two years ago, which I watched again this week. I have seen the movie several times. Last year, after I first saw it, I bought a critical edition, including reviews and source documents, of Graham Greene's novel. I have long appreciated Greene, and I have often wondered why he is not regarded more highly. The reason, I think, is this novel that offended the sensibilities of too many people.

Besides these films, I have been watching a number of movies from Europe. Of course, I do not speak Croatian or French or Italian, so I have to read Thai subtitles. I know from English soundtracks with Thai subtitles that often the dialog gets changed. Sometimes, it is like watching two different movies.

Last weekend I had lunch with two former colleagues who have become friends, one an expatriate Yank and the other a Thai national. Toward the end of the discussion, I asked what is life's Fifth Necessity. [In Buddhist thought, the necessary things are food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.] Without missing a beat, the Yank said 'sex'. Naturally, there is something to be said for that, or none would gather anywhere for lunch, past, present, and future. But the Thai, after a moment, replied 'stories'. Pretty good, I thought, and perhaps closer to the truth about us – closer even to the truth about the Yank, who is a voracious reader. The problem is, when I say 'us', I am unsure whether that word means everyone everywhere or merely we three.

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This puts me in mind of Gibson's 'Passion' which, in the end, I did not see. I gathered enough information from the production-company's web-site, and from questioning those who saw the film, to confirm my biased suspicions. It is textually inaccurate, politically compromised, and basically a melange of competing traditions. Of course, if one is inside this competition, such political compromise is business as usual. If one is outside, the assumption is likely to be that all of it is mythical nonsense, which is also business as usual.

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4 July 2004, Sunday morning

It's finally happening. The murals are being restored at Monpuyak Monastery.

Yesterday, after an absence of nearly two years, Janjira and I went to ask permission of the abbot for me to take digital images of the paintings inside the ordination hall. The abbot could not be found, but a monk told us that a team from Bangkok was busily working and had been for nearly a month.

This was news to me, because part of my reason for writing about the monastery has been to seek funding for restoration, perhaps from the Getty Foundation, which supports such projects here in SE Asia. (I began researching this place in 1999, if memory serves.)

So, the monk said to go up and have a look inside the ordination hall, where the murals reside. The hall sits atop a raised foundation surrounded by a wall blocking the view from below, so when I climbed the stairs there was a small surprise. For the first time in all my visits to the monastery, the doors and windows of the hall were open wide. Inside were three scaffolds supporting a team of three women and two men working on walls that are now remarkably cleaner. Grime, dust, and well-intentioned patches of white paint along old cracks have been removed, so that now the frieze around the room is clearly visible.

Funding for the restoration is through the national Fine Arts Department in Bangkok, whose budget is too small to accomplish the many tasks set for itself. The man heading the team of restorers is called Samark. Perhaps in his mid-thirties, he has been doing this type of work for ten years. Samark has given me permission to take photographs and also given me an assignment. He wants to know what adhesive will work best when mounting a water-based painting on cloth to a wooden panel. This is because there are two such tattered paintings remaining from a total of nine brought from Mandalay in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These are located in another building, a wooden viharna.

Something must be in the air. Only last week, I returned to work on the manuscript begun in 1999, when the main concern was translation of the stone inscription that tells of the monastery's founding. Lately I have been writing descriptions of the Jataka tales that serve as subjects for the murals inside the hall. These ten tales are called 'Thotsachart' in reference to the last ten incarnations of the Buddha. Probably, the Thai will know these tales better than would a Western audience, which fact makes for a small problem in sustaining the interest of half the conceivable readers of a book written in English and in Thai.

Because I have been thinking about these walls for a long time, I would like to have a more direct hand in the project, to be upon the scaffold, working on the murals, even if only for a day – a guest really. The restoration I have done is mostly oil on canvas, but perhaps Samark will show me how to proceed after we know each other better. It would be nice to have some part, however small, in bringing these murals back to life. Meanwhile, Samark wants to see what I have written to date. When we spoke together, he seemed surprised by some little-known history. Well, little-known history tends to be like that. But then, there is also the extremely remote mathematical possibility, hardly worth a passing thought, that my data are dead wrong.

[I wrote the above a couple days ago. Since then, I have been up on the scaffold. That happened yesterday. Today I am sore. It's been almost ten years since I was upon scaffolding at the Rialto Theater, and I've got a hitch or two in my get-along, as Mrs. Henry used to say about her old dog. This Saturday, Janjira will return with me to Monpuyak. She knows I need a translator to keep out of trouble. Really, it is amazing what happens when I get the tones wrong – or even sometimes when speaking English. Because I speak Thai a little, my English is sometimes heard as Thai. One time I asked for "quiet" and everyone thought I said that water buffaloes were copulating. (I believe that's the polite verb in progressive tense – or is that congressive? Never mind.)]

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Last Saturday (24 July) was interesting. In the afternoon, Janjira and I attended a cremation. In the evening, we went to a double wedding. The cremation was the shortest I have ever seen, because the man died in a fiery automobile accident. There was a young man, a sort of master of ceremonies, who sang haunting old songs in the local language, especially as the pyre was ignited. Earlier, these songs had alternated with monks droning in Pali. There must have been 200 people in attendance, and everyone was wearing black, sitting under spreading trees. The wedding was a study in contrasts, with local brides, sisters, dressed traditionally but in all other respects behaving like game show contestants. The grooms were a treat. One was an associate professor of industrial engineering from Turkey. The other was an associate professor of sociology from Baltimore. The sisters, one a former student of mine, have been away for years, but returned home to marry. At the end of the evening, two young Thai women (including one who has studied these past 12 years in Sydney) used microphones to interview the wedding party. Of course, video cameras were rolling. The questions were as inane as anything Letterman might ask, and answers were awkward at best. The guests sitting around on mats were mostly extended family and properly tolerant local dignitaries. It was MTV visiting the United Nations. Later, the wedding party and guests repaired to a nightclub with two bands playing simultaneously and a karaoke room with its door open. Out on a balcony, overlooking the Mae Wang river, the horses' devoirs were great. You can guess where Janjira and I were stationed, talking to a magazine editor from Bangkok, until the bridegroom from Baltimore joined our table. He's also an author, and my former student had lent me a copy of his book, which is an expose of American foreign policy in terms of the military-industrial complex that drives it. At one point I told him to look me directly in the eyes and tell me that he is not with the CIA, and that his book is not so-called dis-information. He managed the second part.

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My friend Roger tried to take scissors to my sister's head. I liked Roger, but he and I were never the same again after that, because Darlene was screaming and I may have hit Roger to get his attention. Certainly I turned him out. A day or two later, I had to face his friend, Jon, whom I decked. Then, of course, came Jon's big brother, Hal, who was older by a number of years and went to another school. I doubt Hal really wanted to defend his stupid younger brother, but that was the code, so he warned me. Probably I stared at him. It was a weapon of sorts. No longer, but at one time I had an effective thousand-yard stare, as if others were not there. Of course they were, but the idea was to make them think they

might not be. These days, thanks to the influence of action movies, everybody has a thousand-yard stare, so what's the point.

It seems like I was always going it alone. My friend Barry across the street was a buddy for years and mostly we got along fine, but all that time his much older brother Ronnie, and Ronnie's friend Doug, would push Barry and me together to fight. I did not want to fight Barry, but he would smile and slug me. He was either a performing monkey or unconscious, because the next day everything would be back to normal. In any event, I assigned his bullying to the older boys. Ordinarily, though he liked to wrestle, Barry was not pugilistic. Me? On the whole, wrestling was all right. I learned the holds the hard way. Then, one day following another forced steel cage match, Barry slugged me without provocation or backup, and, because I could not hit him, I pinned him to the ground. I held him down and asked him how he liked it, and I twisted his arm until he cried to be released. But I waited. I made him think about it. Finally, when I let him go, he stood up and rubbed his arm without looking at me. There was wounded surprise all over his face. Suddenly something had changed; perhaps something like the balance of power. He knew it, and I knew it. I left him standing there, went home and felt miserable all day. After that, we seldom saw each other.

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#### ABSTRACT

Raymond Chandler stops writing detective yarns to work on the Genome Project:

Dames represent an advanced cognitive system of gene starts, and no need for a twice-over. In mammalian genomes like you find in some dames, a guy's system can't help predicting a start location or two from information about CpG islands and signals downstream. Or maybe some guys are just suckers for Markov models. I mean, what guy's system doesn't aim at some region that contains a good gene start, or somewhere in proximity at least. Hell, so far as that goes, it's all good. Let's face it: nucleotides or bourbon and water, any guy's likely to make at least one prediction on a Saturday night. You can bank on it. Still, it always comes down to predictive ability as judged by results. You can bank on that, too, 'cause on Saturday night, what other standard is there? Stakeout after stakeout, it's always and only results that count, results that matter, especially when the lights come up after last call at that little spot along chromosome 21 and Route 66. And after all these years, what was the score? Overall, plain bourbon and water lent superior accuracy (> 87.9% Hammett 1934) and provided the most confident predictions. That was it. That's all she wrote. Besides, why would anyone give a rat's ass or a bus token for nucleotides, anyway.

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[From an e-pistle to Howard Goldman]

Especially during these past ten years, I have paid attention to the dualities of just about everything. No, I am not a dualist, per se. I mention this because you remarked the disjunction between humanity and the world. Here, I would like to propose a distinction between the real and the natural. I am unsure whether I can make this distinction work, I have not tried it before, it came to me just now. I'm positive there is nothing new about it, based upon 54 years of my never having had an original idea. Let's say there are different realities as many as there are people. By implication, reality is 'absolutely relative' – words that are contradictory, dualistic, and apparently accurate. So, there is a paradox at the

center of existence. And what is that? Well, the center is peripheral, that's what. The center is all those personally constructed realities.

Consequently, the vappy koobs are devastated molently all the time. Or, as Chomsky might put it: 'With this clarification, relational information is to be regarded as one ultimate standard determining the descriptive power of base components to account for irrelevant intervening contexts in selectional rules.' Given this, it's difficult to imagine that words reflecting such a human reality might not be reflecting nature at all. Yes, you have guessed rightly: this Schoolman is clinging to an absolute, no matter what some particular reality may be.

Last night I was reading a physicist's glowing assessment of Jiddu Krishnamurti. Then I read one of Krishnamurti's texts, which is where idle curiosity can lead one. He was explaining how the only reality is the present moment. I could not help smiling, because that is such a commonplace. I suspect most people would accept it without blinking. Not I, who was thinking 'Eureka' -- this is my reason for being in the world: I do not buy this stuff, Jiddu. The present, it seems to me, does not exist for human beings because sensory data must be processed. Even if 'it' is only a split-second ago, all we experience is the past. Still, let's give Jiddu credit. Perhaps, by implication, there must be a 'present' toward which we are moving; but that is to say that the future is the present -- and that's the language of the American Chamber of Commerce, proving once again that philosophy has an economic base. And all the while we are discussing this matter of the past, we are using the present tense.

Om. Be still, my son. The previous day I had met friends for a late lunch after reading all morning in connection with the unsolicited barrage I sent your way. I told them I was in the midst of Ring lore. One, an editor, takes a call on his cell phone. Finished, he tells me that the caller is a nature photographer whose father discovered the Bezzine Ring. They are working on a book together. After lunch, I returned home to continue reading. The article is discussing certain abilities arising from the presence of so-called Dragon blood, including the ability 'to obtain, after the fact, those confirmations required'. End quote. The article said that the ability is similar to the manner in which Kerkule (sic) discovered the Bezzine Ring.

This morning, while hanging clothes out to dry (we still do that on this side of the planet), I was thinking long thoughts on power and legitimacy. Lately, I have been force-fed more than the usual doses of 'might-makes-right' which hardly any thinking person doubts any more, apparently. So finally the clothes are on the line and I begin to burn trash in the corner of the wall. Lately, collection has been dicey. Usually I do not burn there, but I want to keep smoke away from the clothes while I am still thinking about power. Then I notice a crusty piece of something on the ground, so I pick it up and turn it over. It's a piece of plastic the size of a dog tag. In white letters on red it says "power" -- that one word only, in upper case. Specifically, to put a finer point on it, I was thinking about the myriad abuses of power perpetrated 'in the name of God'. I am not joking here.

A while back, I read an article about vegetarian lions in the NYC Zoo (was it?). I read another discussing a fossil that has been twice dated at 1.5 million years older than Lucy, yet it is morphologically indistinguishable from *Homo sapiens sapiens*. That's us, one might think, except it isn't us, because it's too old -- and that's the nature of the reality of nature. There's always some taxonomy for our perceptions. I saw a photo insert: a man in China who just came from surgery to remove some of the heavily matted hair covering 96% of his body. The record-holder is alive in Mexico, at 98%. (I could not help thinking of Esau.) Another article said that Robert Ballard found the remains of a city under the Black Sea. Nemopolis, one assumes. Meanwhile, at Qumram, somebody found a scroll

telling of the time when people and animals spoke together. Maybe the Grail bloodline boys can figure out how to use this one, so to claim matrilineal descent from Mrs. Dr. Doolittle (< OF 'douay lite El'). Or maybe donations from the Tunbridge Wells Doolittles to the Qumram library include bedtime stories for little Nazarene toddlers. Personally, I have always thought that the drawings on the walls at Lascaux were decorating a Neolithic nursery. But I digress.

Starting today, solipsism is the only tenable explanation. So, I suppose, in writing this to you, I am really only sending email to an aspect of myself. I am not sure what I will feel when you read this. Never mind.

Let's do what materialists do, take everything at face value. Your reality is the truth -- at the very least, it is the truth for you. Mine, too. That is, my reality is also the truth for you. I know this is true, because today we became solipsistic; and as it's my reality, you can do whatever I want. This leads to the Enriched Uranium Rule, Do unto others as you would want yourself to do unto others.

It may have been the Battle of Vicksburg where a soldier named Kirkland carried water to the wounded enemy. On another day, on another field, Kirkland was shot dead. I sometimes wonder whether it was friendly fire. And this is because I seem to be predisposed to think in certain ways.

When I was a boy, I was exposed to Roman Catholicism. My grandmother was Catholic and so was an elderly neighbor who taught catechism and took me to mass. Then I moved to Colorado, where I attended a Presbyterian Church until I got weary of Calvin. At university, I became a professing atheist, and that lasted for about two years. The long and thoughtful letter you last sent me is a more sophisticated version of my thoughts at that time. But something happened, the slats got knocked out from under me, and soon I was a believer -- but of no particular denomination. It was all quite inchoate. In the next couple years, one or two odd coincidences happened to me. I mean extremely odd, and I will tell you about them someday. After I returned from Indiana, I met a girl who had been raised Catholic and so I was talking soon to her priest, because we had decided to marry. He gave me a book of theology to read, and it was a muddle. I asked questions, and the priest postponed them 'until October, when we will have a more formal study'. Then there is a knock at my front door, so I open it. It's Steve, a friend I had not seen in four years because he dropped out of university. He was standing next to his bicycle, because he had just ridden in from Iowa. He told me that he had left the Catholic Church at the same time he dropped out of university. He had begun studying with Jehovah's Witnesses and wanted to tell me about it. We talked for two days straight, sitting in the kitchen. I mean straight, no bath, no bed, just coffee and sandwiches. When he departed, I went to Colorado State and registered for classes, after an absence of two years. I took History of the Medieval Church and continued from there. Along the way, I was quietly blackballed. The Dean said I was not the first to lodge such a complaint against the tenured ones of the history department. Needless to say, I am not a Catholic today. Nor am I a member of any other organization. Yet, I am a believer. In part, the reason is because when I am thinking about power I find a piece of plastic with the word on it. This sort of thing happens to me not every day, but often. Usually, I do not talk about it.

No, I am not a Dragon bloodliner. No, I am not a Grail bloodliner. I put no stock in gnostic texts. Nor have I any political persuasion. I think politics is the arena for our worst fears and offers no fix for human problems, because human problems are ultimately spiritual. Besides, I believe everything ever said by Otto von Habsburg, and he says we do not learn anything from history and so it repeats itself, so there. Well, of course, I am only half-jesting.

Lately, I have been subject to the unsettling suspicion that everyone knows what's going on with the exception of moi. So I have taken to smiling a lot, like I know something and am hiding it. I make the occasional hand sign, fleetingly, as if my secret order is superior to everybody else's. Walking the street, I mutter incantations and formulae from archaic tongues of my own devising. Which means, of course, that I have become a lot like an old fellow called "Boston" who used to stand slightly behind me, waiting for the light to change at Lincoln and Fourth. He said different things on different days: "Yes, it's a struggle to defend ourselves against the enemy from within"; "Death to the hippie-dippy gang"; and my personal favorite, the one that gave him his nickname, "Do you think Boston can be saved?" At that time, in my bones, I knew I should not have been chuckling at his expense, because the universe is ultimately a just place. What goes around comes around, and we reap what we sow. These days, kids on school buses point at me and laugh. That, it seems to me, is fair enough.

For some reason, I am predisposed to think this way. Apparently some others are not, or if they ever were, they have successfully quashed it. I used to think your 'playful museum' was nuts, but not anymore. Play promotes imagination. Part of the problem with humanity, it seems to me, lies in failures of the imagination that lead to lack of empathy. The only problem I now see with your old idea is that the people who would come to a playful museum are not those who need it most. Rather, visitors would be those predisposed. And if those who need it most are forced to come, we may as well name the place for the Grand Inquisitor. Besides, who am I to suggest that others need it and, by implication, I do not?

Reflection is a form of dualism. It seems to me that everything in human reality cuts two ways. And in our separate realities we make a series of choices until a pattern emerges, and that pattern is our character. Character entails a point of view, the universe that we have made for ourselves. In this way, we are a gaggle of petty elohim. We construct what we will, for whatever reason. I think this means that we can choose not to reflect. And I think that, when we do that, we are no longer in the image of God. This is what I am saying to myself as I walk down the street and the little fingers are pointing. No doubt they too have their separate realities, because it is their nature. I am saying that reality is the nature of the Beast 666, a symbol that I take to signify man as god. I can find no other way to talk about this, except metaphorically. This is not to say that I think Jehovah, the absolute present tense, the great 'I am' is merely a metaphor. Of course, in my reality, the possibility exists that I could be wrong. But, and again of course, I really, really, really, really doubt it.

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I mentioned 'dualism'. Here's what I meant.

Remember the old question: Is the glass half-empty or half-full? One answer is deemed optimistic, the other pessimistic – and we are expected (i.e., conditioned) to respond in that manner. My answer is this: the glass is half-both at the same time.

I have learned a lot from Janjira, who studies herbs formally and carefully. The same leaf can heal or kill, so it is both medicine and poison depending upon how it is used. Then there are frogs. She once said that we might learn a lot from dissecting a frog, but in the process of analyzing (which literally means cutting) something is lost when the frog dies.

Here's another old 'conundrum': If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to hear it, does it make a sound?



My answer since 1968: Yes, it makes a sound, but no one is there to hear it.

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I want to discuss Western philosophy over against what we learn from Helen Keller. I think she plays such a small role in Western thought for reason that her significance is missed. The Miracle Worker is, of course, Annie Sullivan, and I have no intention to denigrate her dogged determination. But from Keller's experiences we learn a great deal by inference. I think she provides us with an implicit critique of Descartes, Kant, Hamann, and Rorty – the mind-body problem, the *a priori*, the *a posteriori*, and the linguistic turn.

Keller somewhere describes her sensations and feelings as chaotic and inchoate, rather like the land before the Word. She was deaf, blind, and without language. The chaos she felt came to an end when she entered the symbolic order. That is, when she made a connection between one sensation [water (was it?)] and another [Annie's gesture against the palm of her hand]. Keller writes that suddenly she 'got it,' and that she began to make connections rapidly from that point on.

I am suggesting that Keller probably had no *a priori* categories. Her experiences were of no immediate avail, just a riot of sensory data. Finally, and most importantly, she was able to bring order to it by reasoning in the absence of language, because there is no other means by which she could have made the logical connection between phenomena and signs. And once she 'got it', she began to apply her discovery as a general rule: phenomena have symbolic representations – although I doubt that, in the beginning, she said anything like that to herself. She later said that there came a realization that things have names.

Was she a Realist or a Nominalist?

Do you think that Helen was solipsistic, before, during, or after the phenomenon of Annie's 'hand' placed flat against her own? When Keller was feeling Sullivan's 'face', she was simultaneously discovering or acknowledging 'the other' and comparing that other with herself. At least, I think so. If anyone, anywhere, had better cause to tend toward solipsism, it would have been Keller. But her communications to the outside, so far as I know, give no indication of this, perhaps because she had to deal with Sullivan's determination. 'Out there' was another will, and it was obviously, at times even painfully, not her own.

[Howard Goldman wrote back to say that Helen Keller became deaf and blind at the age of 18 months, and so this view is in need of revision. I, of course, had thought that Keller was born deaf and blind. Oh well. Another theory crashes and burns.]

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2 September 2004, Thursday.

The mural is finished. Janjira smiled and told me that she would not pay one baht for it. At the current rate of exchange, that is \$.025 – about two-and-a-half American red cents.

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I am having an enjoyable time reading 'A Short History of Nearly Everything'. Basically, the book is about the march of theoretical knowledge, especially pertaining to cosmological origins. Last night I was reading about neutrinos and string theory, having

put aside questions whether the universe is open, closed, or flat, and whether it is aged 4.5 billion, 7 billion, 10 billion, 13.5 billion, or 20 billion years. It's great fun, our theoretical house of cards, but it's also sobering. We really do not know much, but we have all this expensive and intimidating equipment. We also have many contradictory explanations by experts. My favorite just now is the concept of imaginary time, coupled with the Kubo-Schwinger-Martin Condition that 'describes' the nothingness in existence before the Big Bang, according to the Bogdanov Brothers. Then there's Haku's 26-dimensional space, of which 16 dimensions have been 'compactified'. Never mind the 'branes' in M Theory, our response is supposed to be Wow. Well, I must confess my failure of imagination, as I think that particle physicists sound like medieval scholastics, and I suspect that their musings have as much weight and mass. To me, it's hilarious that Einstein's 'cosmological constant', which he considered his biggest blunder (and nearly everyone else agreed), seems to be coming to the rescue. But then again, maybe not. Imaginary time will tell.

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For the benefit of baffled tourists, the menu of a local emporium offers this direct translation to describe the characteristic benefits of its Mexican Iced Coffee, topped with whipped cream:

"Nutty soft taste, refresh, return to flourishing, passing from cooling ice, Kahlua liquer inside, Cowboy have energy, surface with milk."

I am just as baffled as the tourists, though perhaps for a different reason. The problem for me is that I have lived here long enough to understand immediately what is being said without reference to the original Thai. That would be frightening, were it always the case -- but it is not. Half the time, I still don't get it.

Driving home last night along a dark stretch, with blinding halogen lights coming in the opposite direction, I was looking for the unmarked turn to my village when a Cowboy in an oversized truck came roaring past using half of my lane. I could not move over because of the mother and child on a motorbike to one side. On the other side was a lane and shoulder that the Cowboy simply refused to use. Just a cowboy on the trail, staying the course.

The Thai word for such people is 'kwai' meaning water buffalo, and last night I finally figured out how to render its meaning into English. The word would be 'jackass' because the Cowboy was stubborn and stupid, the salient characteristics of any 'kwai'. Ah ha, I said to myself, to get the meaning one must change animals. And figuring that out only took me fifteen years. Then I smiled, thinking how 'jackass' would come out, if one worked backwards from the menu's Mexican iced coffee. It would be 'lah-tua-puu'. This is because 'lah' means donkey, while 'tua-puu' carries the meaning of 'jack'. For those of us who have been away from the farm a spell, the male and female donkeys are jack and jenny, respectively. So, on the distaff side, 'jenny' would be 'tua-mia' -- and that is why the reckless Cowboy is a 'donkey body husband' and not a 'donkey body wife'. Of course, a Thai listener would be completely baffled by this direct translation of 'jackass' and no explanation on my part would help much, because it is like passing from cooling ice, refresh, surface with milk. I wish I could tell you that the rear window of the truck was decorated by a decal with an outline of Texas. I cannot, although I have seen such things here.

I have also seen decals of Osama, which may go some distance to explain why I was stopped recently on the sidewalk. Because it is impolite to stare at people, I did not

see the former student who called my name. He asked if I remembered him, and I said yes -- which was true, although I could not readily recall his name.

So call him Ishmael. He was a student perhaps ten years ago, maybe more, and he was a polite and shy young Muslim in a room full of Buddhists. But I think he did not stop me to say hello. Rather, he stopped me to say that he is learning Arabic. We spoke together in Thai, because Ishmael does not use English and no longer remembers it. He pointed to the sky and told me that he is studying Arabic, reading the Koran, and learning about heaven. I said it is good to learn a language and to learn what is inside books. He told me the Arabic word for heaven, and I tried to say it correctly in return. Ishmael said he is learning about heaven, because this world is no good. I said yes, I agree, the world is unstable. He again pointed to the sky. I told him that it was good to see him. He said 'uh' which needs no translation and turned away. It was not exactly rude, but it was not polite, either. It was subtle because, if he is anything at all, Ishmael is no Cowboy.

The school Ishmael attended, and where I taught for a time, was founded by a man who attended university in Waco, Texas. Perhaps two years ago I was in his office and saw a photograph that had been taken months earlier at a ranch in Texas. In the photograph, the founder was standing next to two men. One was the founder's old classmate, who is chair of the school's Board of Governors. His name is Dr. Supachai Panichpakdee. Besides his duties as Chair, Dr. Supachai is also Secretary of the World Trade Organization. The photograph may have been taken just before his appointment. Meanwhile, the Third Man in the photograph was George Bush, Sr. He was smiling broadly and holding bourbon on the rocks rather than Mexican iced coffee. I thought this was odd, given the provisions of NAFTA and the ranch's proximity to the border.

It's a very small world. Does someone like Ishmael understand the forces at work any better than someone like J.Q. Public? You can bank on it Mr. Bush knows and that Mr. bin Laden knows. The two families did business together. Now they're just staying the course. Why, in Plain View, they'd be jes' two peas in a pod, with a nutty taste.

I suppose that, in Thai, one would be 'donkey body husband' and the other would be 'camel body husband'. To get the meaning, one must change animals or none will be able to tell who is who and what is what. Not in this world.

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The age of the universe is given as  $10^{18}$  seconds. The total number of atoms in the universe is computed to be considerably less than the probability that amino acids would form a simple protein by chance, which is given at  $1:10^{260}$  and still says nothing about the probability of amino acids themselves forming in the first place. Experts say there are 20 amino acids necessary to form living beings. Meanwhile, there may be as many as a million different proteins in the human body. The chance that a 1,055-sequence molecule (collagen, say) would form spontaneously is absolutely zip. Zero. When you start considering what has come to be called 'irreducible complexity' in organisms, the numbers become even more daunting. But here the mathematics is simply disallowed. "The fact is, the probability is zero, yet that is just what happened!" someone wrote -- meaning, of course, by chance. Earlier, that someone was discrediting certain views by quoting Feynman's disparaging remarks in respect of anything 'a posteriori'. Me? I am still shaking my head. But, being a leg watcher, I may not know a good posteriori when I see one. Never mind.

So, we are talking one million times  $10^{260}$  permutations in  $10^{18}$  seconds. But actually, life began rather late in the day, if you think of the age of the universe as a 24-hour period. The most recent calculations put the rise of life in the last minute or less before midnight. Well, one of the bizarre truisms or factoids or whatever people find to be an acceptable substitute for what's what is that, given the immense periods of time suggested by so many experts, it still is not time enough – this, according to other experts – to account for life. Gentlemen of the jury, I ask you.

Quarks. How do we know quarks are real? The answer is simply that all calculations depend on their existence to give the right answers for experiments. Guess what? I think quarks may actually exist, based upon mathematical prediction – just as I think mathematical probability shows that collagen has no chance to form by chance.

Let's warrpp sppeeceed ahead to Heisenberg's matrix math equation:  $\Delta x \Delta p = \hbar / 2p$  where  $\Delta x$  is the indeterminacy of the position and  $\Delta p$  is the indeterminacy of the momentum. Here  $\hbar$  is Planck's 'reduced constant'. Those who purport to know say that Heisenberg stated that the non-validity of rigorous causality is necessary and not just consistently possible. (That is to say, I think, necessary to the uncertainty of the principle, so to make it consistently possible. Which means to say, I think, necessary to make possible the consistent uncertainty of the principle. I'm not sure, this is language -- notice here the importance of a comma – which almost everyone agrees has not the clarity of mathematics. Yes, I am joking.) Meanwhile, Heisenberg himself said he did not know what was a matrix.

This ramble has to do with what is considered to be credible evidence. (I think you do not want to get me started on radiometrics.) And we, mere laymen, are discussing cosmologies. Admittedly, as mere laymen, we are not of the priesthood.

Where are we? Not so very far along, I think. Why do I say priesthood? I am not implying that Heisenberg's mathematics is wrong – but I am implying that there is an underlying set of assumptions arising from the philosophy of science. As Michael Ruse stated in a keynote speech to the American Academy in 1993, those assumptions are seldom examined and, at bottom, they are metaphysical. Of course, Ruse was reflecting on Darwinism not Saganism. That said, I must admit my irritation with those enlightened souls who think that anyone who does not parrot prevailing shibboleths is somehow soft in the head. My point is that there are grounds for doubting the paradigm, however irritating that factoid may be.

With each passing year, he wrote expansively, what we know of the universe seems more and more like a Rorschach. To me the evidence is highly equivocal, although mathematical probability is not. But perhaps that's only what I choose to see? The question is, of course, whether mathematical probability has any relation to an 'a posteriori' reality. But, if we say no in one context, on what ground do we say yes in another context? On the other hand, maybe there is some need in the sciences no different, qualitatively (to hell with quanta at this point), from that in the College of Cardinals. Me? I say nothing will come of nothing, based upon my soft headed, pre-Ptolemaic experience – and then I ask myself, why is there something instead of nothing? The answer, of course, appears to be counter-intuitive.

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Measurement and classification control our thought and perceptions. For years now, I have wondered whether these human constructs reflect nature or reality accurately, if at all. For example, few people would think of slime mould as having characteristics of

an animal or even a plant. A slime mould has been felicitously described as an 'ambulant self-activating protoplasm'. As you by now know, it exists as single haploid cells called myxamoebae. However, there is a multi-cellular stage, in which these cells aggregate to form a slug, or pseudoplasmodium. This slug migrates with its anterior raised slightly. Once the slug stops migrating, the cells reconfigure. Cells at the anterior tip form a tubular stalk that extends downward through the slug. At the same time, it lifts those cells which were moving along as the slug's posterior. These cells become a 'fruiting body' -- that is, a sac of spores. The whole organism functions like a plant. Along comes the wind, it ruptures the sac of spores, and you can guess the rest.

Besides being surprised to learn that slugs are a form of slime mould, one might ask how 'it' is to be classified. I have no suggestions. Others do, however. Life is ordinarily classified into one of five kingdoms: animalia, plantae, fungi, monera, and protista. Protista include slime moulds, amoebas, and seaweed. One calculation makes this class include as many as 200,000 different species of organism -- that is, using the same system. Another entirely different system has three 'domains' (bacteria, archaea, and eukarya) of twenty-three divisions. But, an old boy at Harvard thinks classification should entail only two 'empires' for living things -- proto-eukaryota and eukaryota. Okay, that works for me, as science loves simplicity, but is a virus a living thing? Yes, it is. No, it isn't. Well, uh, actually it's both and neither at the same time. Oh, okay, if you say so.

Taxonomies divide the world in accordance with whatever taxonomists choose to emphasize. Of course -- because taxonomy is interpretation, as is mathematics in theoretical physics. (I make this last leap in order to push our discussion.) The point is that interpretation controls perceptions of reality. This is what I mean in saying that human reality is constructed.

Here's the problem: if one believes that a virus is neither dead nor alive, then it is neither. If one believes that behavior is genetically determined, then it is. If one believes that a medicine is efficacious, then it is. If one believes there are quarks of different colors and flavors, then there are. If one believes there are ghosts, then there are.

Right now I have a virus, and whether it is dead or alive is moot -- my body is fighting it through high temperatures, chills and coughing. I believe this reactive behavior is genetically determined. Meanwhile, I am not taking any medicine, because I do not believe it would help against a virus. Personally, I have never encountered a quark. Nor have I encountered a ghost. But I have met people who, for different reasons, believe in one or the other, and sometimes both. That's all I can report for now.

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15 December

I went outside and happened to look up. There was a fast moving flock, perhaps a dozen, headed toward Doi Prabaht in a more or less South-Easterly direction. Had they been seagulls or anything else but large falcons I would not have been so surprised. I have never seen predatory birds in a flock, ever. Moreover, the only white falcon I know is the gyrfalcon of the far north -- as in Greenland -- and I do not know whether they migrate. This flock may have been joined by another flock coming from the West -- I could not be certain, because the trees around my house soon blocked the view. It took less than a quarter of a minute -- there and gone, just like that.

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Today I am meeting Mr. Richard Lair for lunch. He is a former filmmaker and longtime editor who once stayed in Modigliani's studio, visited Robert Graves on Mallorca where, at a party, the poet sang sea shanties to the guitar of Julian Bream), stayed nine months at the same poet's house in London, played a CIA agent in *The Killing Fields*, directs the Thai Elephant Orchestra, and is possessed of a restored print of Carl Dreyer's 1928 silent film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, which credits Antonin Artaud and Paul le Cour. Me? I sit and listen a lot.

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To Richard Lair:

From the caption under your photo in "When Elephants Paint" I gather that you have been transmuted from a teacher to a dietary staple – Aharn Chang.\* I also learned that Lampang is north of Chiang Mai and Jackson Pollock gave no thought to what he was doing. Oh well. I find the book informative in places, but too much space is allotted the tiresome Komar & Melamid, Inc. It's numbing to think only their more astute observations may have been recorded.

\* อาหารช้าง rather than อาจารย์ ช้าง

Mr. Lair responds:

Yes, it is true. I have elephant bites all over my body [and] Lampang is north of Chiang Mai. In the [elephant] painting calendar, Lampang is on the Mekhong River – so this is mutually corroborating. Alex was really obnoxious about this book. It was written by Mia Fineman (you feel like you are in a Woody Allen movie within 50 m. proximity of her) and she should have been credited as author.

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Lately I have been reading 'The Templar Revelation' and 'The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail' and 'The Messianic Legacy' and lectures by Sir Laurence Gardner and transcripts from a website purporting to belong to the Prieure de Sion and Ordo Templi. I fell into this maze more or less by accident several months ago, when doing research for a mural, 'The Brioche Eaters'. At that time, I learned of a Masonic lodge at Versailles, and that fact led elsewhere. At present, I am painting a another mural based in part upon Arthurian legend, so it may be awhile until I am out of the maze.

As anyone who has encountered grail bloodline theories must know, this maze connects the Priory, the Templars, the Cathars, the Masons, and an entire hermetic and esoteric tradition across many centuries. I have been acquainted with aspects of this theory for perhaps 35 years, since I first read Caballa and studied the Cathars at university. The Templars appear in Umberto Eco's 'Foucault's Pendulum', which I have read two or three times, and I once possessed a copy of Albert Pike's Scottish Rite 'Morals and Dogma', found years ago on a library's cutout table. The tome had been donated but, apparently, never catalogued, and I copped it for a quarter. Oh yes, I once owned a publication of the Francis Bacon Society, explaining Joseph of Arimethea's sojourn in Glastonbury and Bacon's instauration of the whole wide world. (According to the Society, Sir Frances was the son of the Virgin Queen and who, Robert Dudley? I cannot recall.)

Before we continue, beware my biases: I am neither Catholic nor Cathar nor Caballist nor Gnostic nor esotericist nor hermeticist nor Mason nor initiate of some cabal. I am, however, a heretic, which should put me in good stead with someone, somewhere.

These books turn upon Mary Magdalene, who is said to have been a prostitute and to have washed the feet of Jesus and to have anointed him.

However, there are several Marys in the Greek scriptures, and it appears to me that supporters of the grail bloodline have some confused – as does the Roman Catholic Church. I suppose this means that, in my view, both sides to this controversy are making a mistake.

The first Mary is easiest. She is Mary the wife of Joseph and mother of Jesus, and the daughter of Heli and Anna. Besides Jesus, she had four more sons and at least two daughters.

The second Mary is called the Magdalene. This name means 'of, or belonging to, Magdala'. The town of Magdala was on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, about halfway between Capernaum and Tiberias. The gospels describe Jesus as casting demons from Mary, after which she becomes his follower and the first person to see him after the resurrection. Contrary to Catholic tradition, no gospel anywhere describes Mary Magdalene as a prostitute. The grail bloodline descends from a proposed marriage between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, into which descent married the dragon bloodline Merovingians. Something like that.

The third Mary is the sister of Martha and Lazarus. She is also known as Mary of Bethany. In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John, she is described as anointing Jesus, and she has been confused with another woman, unnamed, who in Luke's gospel also anoints Jesus. The event reported by Luke happened one year earlier than the event described by Matthew, Mark, and John. Also, the event reported by Luke took place in the northern district of Galilee, in the house of a Pharisee. The event reported in Matthew, Mark, and John happened a year later in the house of Simon the Leper, at Bethany in Judea, which is in the south, and that event pertains to Mary of Bethany. Again, the woman in Luke's account is unnamed, and she is described as 'a sinner' – and that may mean 'prostitute' or something else; we do not know.

So, what seems to have happened is that two different Marys (Bethany and Magdalene) were conflated with an unnamed third woman who may not have been a prostitute. Voila, this is how the Roman Catholic Church produces Mary Magdalene, the prostitute. And it seems to me that the grail bloodliners are taking this elliptically shaped ball and running with it.

Of course, there are still more Marys, but they do not figure into this mess – at least so far. For example, there is 'the other Mary' who was the wife of Clopas/Alphaeus (the brother of Joseph) – so this means that Mary was Jesus' aunt. She went with Jesus into Galilee and was present at his death. Later, she was outside the tomb, with Mary Magdalene.

Then there is Mary the mother of John Mark. She was also the aunt of Barnabas. Her home was used for a meeting place by the early Christian congregation in Jerusalem.

And there is Mary of Rome. In his letter to the Romans, Paul sent greetings to her and commended her 'many labors'. Maybe some theorist will interpret that to mean that she gave birth many times, thereby helping to increase the congregation in Rome.

The grail bloodliners apparently do not stop to think that, because Joseph and Mary are descendants of King David, ALL of their children are descendants of David as well. Jesus' cousin, John the baptizer, is probably a descendant of David through his mother

Elisabeth. And there must be other families who are descendants of David, considering the nature of family trees. But these other descendants would probably not be as good press.

What is all this about – the return of some Merovingian king? Perhaps, but I keep an eye to passing remarks of an Angevin dragon bloodliner, Prince Nicholas de Vere von Drakenberg, to wit:

"Ingratiating themselves into false 'Orders', hoping to gain a following and get a plentiful supply of free lunches/blowjobs, these pseudo-royal and ersatz noble hypocrites and liars are arrogant enough to think that they deserve to have their arses continually licked by fawning fools whom, furthermore, they think that they have the unimpeachable right to insult as well as injure by flogging these ingenuous sycophants. Revolting. Worthless New Age literary detritus at overblown prices into the bargain."

Prince Nicholas is referring to those works published in the wake of Holy Blood and Holy Grail, and surely also to the lectures and writings of Sir Laurence Gardner, from whom he split. Perhaps the Prince is also referring to popular novels such as 'The Da Vinci Code', unless this novel was published after his famous 'rant'. Still, de Vere is not denying the bloodline – he is calling for a different perspective, and one that he claims is more accurate: namely, that the grail bloodline is a backwater of the dragon bloodline. And so on it goes.

Here's what I currently think. First of all, the Priory of Sion is real – the only question is its age and pedigree. Ultimately, the age and pedigree are unimportant, because it is their ideas that move people. And those ideas are based upon ancient manuscripts. Most of those manuscripts are from Gnostic sources. Gnosticism is a mixture of Egyptian mystery tradition, Greek philosophy, and second century Christianity.

When sorting out the various claims, it is best to use a timeline – that indispensable tool. Here's an example why: in Laurence Gardner's lectures, it is claimed that the monotheism of Moses derives from Egypt. This is because Moses grew up in Egypt and that kingdom was monotheistic during the Amarna Period. Here's the problem: Moses lived around 1590-1470 BCE, while the Amarna Period was 1120-1070 BCE. That is, Moses lived four hundred years earlier than the Amarna Period.

The same thing happens with the Gnostic gospels. They were written anywhere from fifty to one hundred-fifty years after the canonical gospels. Paul's letters, written around 50-55 CE, are already speaking of the apostasy that has sprung up, as do the letters of Peter and, forty years later, the writings of John – who, by the way, warns against those who claim the possession of a special gnosis. Then, around 110-125 CE, the personal disciples of the twelve apostles, such as Barnabas and Polycarp, are writing – and they talk about the apostasy having spread everywhere.

One Gnostic gospel that is often cited is the Gospel According to Thomas. It contains a passage wherein Peter speaks against Mary Magdalene and women in general. Here is the quote: "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Well, that's accurate so far as it goes. But then Jesus says: "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter into the kingdom of heaven." And that is how the Gospel of Thomas ends.

Now, here is where the fun begins. Supporters of the grail bloodline argue that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were preaching a doctrine of equality, that they were married with children, and that actually Mary was a priestess of Isis and Jesus her servant. Well, maybe so, but not even the Gospel of Thomas will support that claim. Moreover, textual critics agree that a later writer added the passage to Thomas, including Peter's alleged



remark. Further, supporters of the bloodline claim that Jesus survived his execution and went to live in caves outside Jerusalem for the rest of his days. The only problem is, for over one hundred years after his death, there was a standing offer of money for anyone who could produce his body and/or would say that his body had been stolen – according to different sources including the dialogue between Justin Martyr and Trypho the Jew.

Some think the grail is the cup from which Jesus drank, but they misunderstand, because the apostles and disciples would most likely not have preserved it. They did not venerate objects; that begins later, in the fourth century with the rise of Roman Catholicism.

As for Isis herself, she is one form of the gentle goddess found everywhere. It amazes me how her current adherents overlook human sacrifice as part of that religion. Allow me to say that only this past month a Thai mother sacrificed her two children to the goddess, which corresponds with texts from 3,000 years ago.

Here's the bottom line: There are people who believe these things and more, and some of them trace their lineage through the so-called grail bloodline and even further back through a dragon bloodline, which began with genetic experiments of the reptilian Annunaki gods. This is their claim, and, some of these people are in positions of real power and influence. Among these people are European nobility, modern-day Templars, Freemasons, occultists, and the Priory. These groups do exist and they do overlap. Yes, they are often bankers and politicians. Some are coming out of the closet, lecturing and publishing, and citing each other as expert opinion. This is an old game.

Here's the problem: I doubt that the audience for these speakers and writers has the time and energy to sort through the barrage of information and misinformation that these experts perpetuate. Believe me, some of these are smooth talkers.

Here's an example: Sir Laurence Gardner often cites the Book of Jasher in support of the proposition that Miriam, not Moses, was the leader of the tribes of Israel. Having heard this, will anyone in the audience go home and look at Jasher? Well, I have had a look at it. Miriam is mentioned seven times. She is mentioned when she is born, when she dies, three times when she is watching Moses, when she prophesies that her mother will give birth to Moses and that he will lead the Jews out of Egypt (Sorry Sir Larry, but that's what it says), and also when God turns her skin to the appearance of leprosy for reason that she went against the authority vested in Moses. That's what's in the Book of Jasher.

Sir Laurence also makes a distinction between the Lord on the one hand and Jehovah on the other. The Lord is actually the kind and supportive Enlil, while the wrathful and jealous Enki is Jehovah – all on the proposition that the origin of the Jews' belief comes from Sumer. Sir Larry's 'Lord' helps Adam and Eve and their descendents, while his 'Jehovah' punishes them and floods the world -- and don't forget The Wars of Jehovah mentioned in Numbers, he says.

However, the name of the book mentioned in Numbers is The Wars of the Lord. Meanwhile, Jasher states that the Lord flooded the world. In Jasher, the name Jehovah appears only once, when Moses is standing before Pharaoh who checks the list of Egyptian gods and cannot find this name. Meanwhile, in the canonical Hebrew texts, one often reads 'the Lord Jehovah' – in translations where the name has not been removed.

Sir Laurence Gardner is a smooth one. He is attached with the European Council of Princes as assistant to Prince Michael Stewart, a Grail blood liner and the head of the Council. (Otto von Habsburg resigned in his favor several years ago, then 33 or was it 36 aristocratic families elected Stewart unanimously.)

To give him his due, Sir Larry is an accurate critic of the Roman Catholic Church's spotty and often bloody history. That institution is another game entirely and better saved

for another day. So far as I can tell, it has generated more nonsense than any organization I can name – although in the past 20 years grail blood liners have been trying to catch up.

Frankly, I find Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln more interesting. They do a fair job of separating fact from speculation, and their hypothesis is at least coherent and possessed of explanatory power. Most useful is the second section of 'The Messianic Legacy', which they have titled 'The Quest for Meaning'. It seems to have its finger on a pulse.

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There is one other thing. Personally, I find waggishly appealing the notion that the Shroud of Turin is a photographic portrait of Leonardo da Vinci, an alleged Grand Master of the Priory. The only apparent problem is that this cloth was exhibited at Lirey two hundred years before the artist's birth.

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It's time for a diversion, gentle reader, should you care to play through a game. This is hardly immortal chess, but it may be amusing. After making a colossal mistake (or three), I was forced into an offensive strategy known as the Stalingrad Defense. It's only fair to mention that Rebel Decade 3.0 usually performs better and it probably had an off night. That said, here we go:

White = Yours truly, inspired amateur

Black = Rebel Decade 3.0 (a.k.a. Light Blue)

1. f3	e5	(Baker-Street Irregular Opening)
2. e4	Bc5	(Maginot Variation)
3. Ne2	Nc6	
4. Ng3	Nf6	
5. Nc3	d5	
6. Na4	Be7	
7. Bb5	O-O	
8. Bxc6	bxc6	(Small skirmish)
9. b3	dx e4	
10. Nxe4	Nxe4	(Expansion of hostilities)
11. fxe4	Qd4	
12. Bb2	Qxe4+	(The onset of minor difficulties)
13. Qe2	Bh4+	
14. Kf1	Qxe2+	(White ==> Stalingrad Defense)
15. Kxe2	Bg4+	
16. Ke3	Bg5+	
17. Kf2	Rad8	
18. Bxe5	Rxd2+	
19. Kg3	Re8	
20. h4	Rxe5	
21. hxg5	Rxg5	
22. Kf4	f6	
23. Rae1	Rxg2	
24. Re8+	Kf7	

25. Rhe1	Rf5+	(Yeah, I know)
26. Ke4	Kxe8	
27. Kd4+	Kf7	
28. Nc5	Rd5+	
29. Kc3	Rxc5+	(The retreat from Moscow)
30. Kb2	Rcxc2+	
31. Ka3	Rxa2+	
32. Kb4	Rgc2	
33. Re7+	Kg6	(The Old Guard rallies)
34. Rxg7+	Kf5	(Take that!)
35. Rg5+	Ke6	(And that, etc.)
36. Re5+	Kd6	
37. Re6+	Kd5	
38. Re5+	Kd4	(Beer Hall Putsch Countermeasures)
39. Re4+	Kd3	
40. Re3+	Kd2	(Keeps getting better, doesn't it)
41. Re2+	Kc1	
42. Re1+	Bd1	
43. Rxd1+	Kxd1	(Voila. Stalemate.)

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It seems I have been cited in some report to the Thai government's Department of Fine Arts. Besides that, I've been told that something I wrote has become the basis for (or part of) a thesis at Chulalongkorn University. This shouldn't happen to a dog, and who would imagine. Apparently both have to do with my research into the stone inscription and murals at Monpuyak Monastery. How a thesis could be derived from anything I have written, I'm not sure – and how the report and the thesis connect, I do not know. The really odd thing is that I have not published, I merely passed along a few pages to an art restorer last July. I did not think he would even look at them, but now I'm told that he inserted two or three pages into the report for the Fine Arts Department. My guess is that it has to do with a speculation regarding the Shan rebellion ca. 1902 and whether the artisans were involved. The monastery's murals were being painted at that time and remain unfinished. But who knows, and isn't life strange.

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It was an afternoon in the autumn of 1969, when, between classes and the job at Bach or Rock Record House, I began to feel run down more than merely tired. There were various symptoms, including light-headedness, a temperature above normal, and a hand that shook when grasping a pen. If I recall rightly, I began to faint. This would have been embarrassing for anyone, except possibly an heiress of Henry James, who, in any case, would swoon, not faint, and likely have little need to hold down a job in a record shop. The point is, rather than slump over the counter or collapse upon an unsuspecting customer, I asked permission to leave early and went to see our family's doctor.

Actually, there were two doctors, Sutton and Baird, and they shared offices. Sutton was a surgeon and the senior partner, so usually I saw Baird, who smoked and played tennis and who, one day about fifteen years later, would lie down for a nap after a long set and never wake up. That particular afternoon, he was not in the office, so Dr. Sutton had me say "ah" and then turned me over to one of the nurses. She was friendlier than most

people of forty during that militant period when anyone over thirty was suspect, and she gave the impression of knowing me rather better than I knew her, as she spoke of her son who was attending classes at the same university. I did not know him, but I did recall him from the local high school. It was polite chitchat, as she prepared to inject me with penicillin.

I cannot recall what she began to say as the needle entered my arm, because I was out before she finished the sentence. Everything went black and my heart started to race. I was laid flat on the table and I could hear voices speaking, sometimes to me, sometimes to one another. The strange thing was that the voices around me seemed to be inside my head, while my own voice came from far off. Everything was ebbing away, instantaneously. It was overpowering, and I asked whether I was about to die.

Then came aural hallucinations: the definitive version of Voodoo Child Concerto, with guitarist Jimi Hendrix and Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic. What a string section, and the music soared. Colors, too, and shapes, began to form and morph freely, and I felt cold compresses applied to my head. The nurses – there must have been two or three by that time – tried to keep me talking as my heart ran a ten thousand-meter dash. I could feel hands. I think there were other injections.

Gradually I came down. The music faded and the wildly morphing shapes changed to a semblance of the room. But the colors were all wrong. Although their uniforms were still white, the nurses' faces were green outlined in black, ugly and reptilian, and I told them so as politely as I could manage. And gradually they, too, returned to normalcy. When I asked, they told me that I had been in outer space about twenty minutes with a pulse rate around two hundred.

Never before had I reacted to penicillin, so they asked me about drugs. Had I ingested anything before coming to the office? I said no, I did not even drink 3.2 beer – so perhaps there was some kind of mistake. Flatly, I was told that could not happen in that office.

When I returned for a checkup a week later, the nurse who administered the injection had departed to work in another office.

Some years after, Dr. Baird was about to prescribe penicillin tablets, so I mentioned the serious reaction. Bemused, he looked through my file, but found no record of it. Are you certain, he asked, that it happened here? Yes, I said, in this very room. Hmm, he said.

Since that afternoon in 1969, I have taken penicillin a few times, and there has been no relapse, no problem at all, so I wonder, sometimes, what it might have been.

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My brother manages a large supermarket including a bakery that sells French and Italian breads. The dough for both varieties, he once told me, is identical. The market's general run of customers will not notice at all, while those more discerning are likely to conclude that both varieties are of inferior quality rather than not at all genuine. It appears that a dupe will proffer an excuse before harboring a suspicion of duplicity. I know this is true, after having tried both kinds and thinking they were not very good.

I take this to suggest the power of words in shaping reality. If I were the Dean of the College of Management & Semiotics, advanced studies would consider those who are confused by flammable and inflammable liquids, comparing and contrasting this group with smokers who have combusted tanks that were 'empty' of everything except fumes.

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

The original impetus for the annual Darwin Awards was to recognize those individuals who had contributed, always inadvertently, to the improvement of the human gene pool by means of eliminating any and all possibility of their own DNA being perpetuated or disseminated. This was ordinarily accomplished by misadventure culminating in death. However, the first-ever presentation of Darwins set such a high standard that the entries in each succeeding year have paled by comparison. One recalls the intrepid inventor who mounted a jet engine upon the chassis of his Chevrolet convertible and flew it into a hillside. That same year, honorable mention went to the man who attached a weather balloon to his lawn chair and drifted over the Pacific, beer and pellet gun (for releasing air) in hand, where he was spotted at altitude by the pilot of a 747 that was circling LAX.

With this in mind, the entries for 2004, while humorous and welcome, unfortunately do not, in the main, qualify for consideration of a Darwin Award – with the notable and sole exception of last year's overall winner. That gentleman, who tested and pulled the trigger of a jammed revolver while looking down its barrel, it must be admitted, proceeded in the best tradition of this spirited competition and is, therefore, a worthy addition to our annual list.

Faithfully yours,  
The Administrators (SE Asia Region)  
Standards & Compliance, Darwin Awards International

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As mentioned earlier, I think religion is on its way out. It too often works as a restraint of trade, and that is inconvenient for supranational corporations. The question is whether consumerism, technology, sports and drugs can fill the void that the elimination of religion entails. Statistics indicating that many millions of people profess this or that do not impress me. In my experience, most people have no idea what they believe and are ignorant of history, so the problem facing social architects is to redirect the religious impulse. Should redirection fail, another means to manage teeming masses would be the fragmentation of consciousness. By this I mean mental confusion akin to Madison's argument vis-a-vis the multiplication of factions in the Federalist Papers No. 10. Instead of competing ideologies in the street, foster competing ideas in any one person's head. I am suggesting that the resultant confusion may lead to apathy or abulia, either of which could be a useful tool.

Last night I was reading Howard Zinn's 'A Peoples History of the United States' and came across a rhetorical gem prior to the revolution, a fictional law firm named Spintext & Quibble. Sounds postmodern.

A third side effect, one that might prove a caution, is anger. That's another, more serious, problem for the Prince to solve.

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Fahrenheit 911, with subtitles, has finally come to Lampang. Everything in the film is stuff I sent to friends and family at home almost two years ago. Did it make any difference? Did the film make any difference? Did Bush and his Crew get re-elected?

The depressing thing is that the film only skims the surface. Things are far more corrupt and convoluted than Michael Moore suggests. And, as usual, either the majority do not want to know or they are so confused they can act only in terms of their indoctrination.

"Let the (she-) eagle fly..." Ashcroft is such a calculating ass. I am embarrassed to be an American. Given the provisions of the so-called American Patriot Act II, I suspect that, sooner or later, I will pay a price for this point of view.

The truth is, had I choice, I would not be a citizen of any country.

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Pope John-Paul II has died.

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I'm exhausted. All I did was not sleep well last night, then arrive at 8 a.m. for a two-hour session at the local nursing college, where eighty-seven students convened to hear a native speaker of English. I was last in a classroom three years ago, and with seventy-seven fewer students. In two hours, I told two stories and read an excerpt from one of King Bhumiphol's speeches. King Bhumiphol fared well enough. The two stories were a mixture of fact and fiction based on some things that my grandfather passed on about his elder brother, Wesley, and their Uncle Jasper. I must admit I got carried away in talking about Wesley and made him into much more of a rogue than my grandfather ever suggested. Well, I suppose I needed to fill time and to keep students interested, and it seemed to me that none of them was likely ever to meet my granduncle, anyway. The implied question is 'what does it matter?' Of course, I did not think it through exactly this way while talking. I was more or less governed by the clock on the wall behind the students. The rest was automatic pilot, as the yarn acquired a life of its own.

There was a simulation of sincere applause when I finished, and I exited as quickly as I was able, to skip down stairs, cross the parking lot and slip past the main gate before the guard could nod or smile. By the time I crossed the street to my parked car, I was utterly depressed. I went home, laid down upon the floor, and stared at the ceiling. Now it is five hours later, and I am beginning to forget the tissue of lies. I hope I never do that again.

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I had been working late, painting a mural. My eyes tired and brain fried, I walked home to find squad cars and an emergency vehicle on the patch of grass fronting a small, rented two-story frame of wood that served as my refuge from the world. In a circular pulse of red light, two authorities in midnight blue were quieting an hysterical young woman while questioning a young man who, by turns, held in or gazed at the grayish bulge protruding from the slash in his belly. He and the girl lived across the street, but I did not know them at all. Another man, paramedics hovering over him, was stretched out in the ambulance. I listened to the girl's muddled story, as an officer took notes.

Words had been exchanged in a nearby poolroom. It was something about women or ethnicity. A fight ensued, and someone pulled a knife. There was a chase and another fight that ended with blood on the ground. A neighbor had yelled out. The assailants fled before the police arrived.

"Who are you. You live here?" an officer asked me.

"Yes, he lives here," responded the girl. "He lives right there in that house, and he might have helped." She turned to me: "You should've done something. You should've. There were four of them, and they had knives. Why didn't you help? Where were you?"

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Maybe, because I have been reading Simon Schama's *Landscape & Memory*, I recall a woman who wore a bonnet and lived among the tall trees near Tyler's cabin. That cabin has to do with the Kuenemans, two doors down on Nelson Avenue and the closest of our neighbors.

Before Helen Kueneman became 'Koomie', she was a Tyler, and so we – my mother, two sisters, brother, and I – were invited two summers in the early 60s to stay at the Tyler family's cabin at Lake Tahoe.

Next door was Mueller's cabin. Mr. Mueller and Mr. K one day pulled up lawn chairs and sat down to debate, the former reading from a Revised Standard and the latter from a Douay. The exchange was good-humored but serious. Later, Mr. K took me for a walk, to breathe in resinous air, discuss the debate, and make his favorite aside, "Don't confuse us with the facts. There's the problem."

Down the path we passed a cabin with high-pitched roof and gaily-painted trim. It was nestled among deep shadows. A low picket fence went round the yard, which was bare ground except for neat piles of raked pine needles. And there were flowers in profusion in a bed that ran along the fence. There I saw the woman, wearing a bonnet. She was kneeling, tilting a watering can, sprinkling patiently around the stalks of a riot of irises and other gaudy plastic blooms.

"Why does she have plastic flowers?" I asked in an undertone, once we were passed.

"Oh, that" Mr. K replied. "I suppose she likes flowers, and there's not enough sunlight under the trees. There's just enough light for moss and fern and little else."

Mr. K admired the Jesuits, and this answer was rational enough. Still, I could not get a hold on it. The answer seemed out of joint. But I was a boy, then, and had yet to understand that one might ask the wrong question.

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4 June 2005

Where to begin? I have started a series of paintings based upon corporate logos, and the first one features the nurse on the Droste Cocoa tin; only, instead of a platter with cup and saucer, she is carrying a skull as one finds in paintings of Magdalene and John the Baptizer.

Janjira asked to use this image as the last slide in a presentation on blood transfusion. She sometimes does this – borrows my paintings – to rouse audiences from confused slumbers. This particular choice for yesterday's presentation, however, was unfortunate. As soon as Janjira had finished the presentation, there came a general alarm. A nurse, on duty, had been stabbed ten times by a man who claimed to love her. She was

in critical condition requiring large quantities of blood. The man, meanwhile, was apprehended after he jumped from a fourth floor window, thus fracturing his spine and breaking a leg. Understandably, no nurse wants to help this fellow. To complicate matters further, the victim, who died, worked with the surgeon who must put the murderer back together.

\*\*\*\*\*

This past month has been interesting in the sense of RFK's old Chinese curse. The mundane stuff alone would have been enough. Let's begin with the unreadable and sometimes indecipherable documents in English that I had to translate into Thai for the hospital. Then, there was a blown engine followed by a valve job; then, two weeks later, a crack in the block that requires the motor in our car to be replaced altogether. (A mechanic says it will be ready later today.) Also, there have been three heavy storms, toppling trees and blowing tiles from roofs, followed by intermittent water shortages in our village (it's not flowing as I write). And, uh, let's see, a hard-drive had to be replaced after it went permanently wonky. A new pair of white pants and a light blue shirt came back from the laundry with rather noticeable oil stains here and there – and so on. Well, enough on this aspect of the list.

More importantly, there was a murder at the hospital: one of Janjira's colleagues was stabbed ten times. Then her relative Dawk-Jan died. At the same time, a colleague of mine caught a stick in the eye which, owing to a comedy of errors, became seriously infected at the same time his blood-platelet count went south and his joints (all of them) froze up. Then Tik, Janjira's oldest and closest friend, had a hysterectomy owing to uterine cancer. On Friday, the same day the vacuum advance cracked, Tik had a CT scan (abdominal) that indicates she has cancer of the liver. Today she is headed to Chulalongkorn Hospital in Bangkok. We are helping her as we can.

\*\*\*\*\*

I agree, in part, that Western civilization is a great conversation. This view suggests more than a mere relationship between things and ideas, such as gives rise to cross-indexing. It suggests that books talk not only across the centuries, writer to reader, but also that they address one another across the stacks and around the corners of a library. Certainly I have experienced this curious sensation – hallucination, really. So, while I concede that positing a great conversation makes sense, it does not entirely correspond with the image I prefer, one that includes blocks of cases, to be sure, but also aisles turning this way or that when not running into walls. A maze, then.

It must have been in 1993, during the period I was reading widely about Southeast Asia, that I came across a book about the origins of modern Myanmar (Burma). In this book there was a footnote about synchronic and diachronic approaches to the study of history. Well, I was not at all sure what the author was saying, nor do I recall the particular context, only those two terms, diachronic and synchronic, which I decided to explore by perusing a book that was cited in the footnote. That book led to another book, and so on, until I was in a textual maze that led far from Southeast Asia. It led me from history and cultural studies into postmodern theory. I spent five years in that maze, before I found an exit, and by that time my perceptions were altered.

. the background of each word in a sentence --> the construction of reality



\*\*\*\*\*

Saturday, 30 July 2005: Today I learned a little about planting rice. Rice stalks bound with thin strips of dampened bamboo are strewn across a paddy to float upon water to depth of perhaps six inches. Each bunch has perhaps two hundred stalks. These are picked up one bunch at a time and planted as one moves along. A small bunch of six or seven thin stalks is pulled from the bound bunch in the left hand. This small bunch, in the right hand, is held between the forefinger and thumb. After turning the wrist 45-degrees in a counter-clockwise motion, the bunch is inserted directly into the mud, with the stalks going in as the forefinger pokes a hole.

The farmers were patient with me. This little maneuver is trickier than it looks. Counting Mississippi-one, Mississippi-two, I estimated that they are capable of planting one bunch per second, in a continuous motion, about a foot apart on the interstices of an imaginary grid. It's all quite geometric, and paddy properly planted has an orderly beauty.

The fields can be steamy. Fortunately, today was not hot. I only planted for an hour or so, because my back does not like all the bending over. But there were people older than I am, working away steadily, most having done this all their lives. What must that be like?

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I think it was in 1965, after I had been in Colorado a year, that I found a summer day's work in the sugar beet fields of a nearby farmer. The job was to hoe weeds. Usually this work was done by braceros, migrant workers, from Mexico – but this constituted an experiment. As I recall, the pay was 50-cents per hour, and the sun was merciless.

Walking to the field, I overheard some scuttlebutt to the effect that "Jonny" would be joining us. Everyone but me was shaking their heads, all in the know. So I had to ask. Who? As it turned out, Jonny was the brother-in-law of the farmer – his wife's younger brother, all of eighteen or nineteen. That was three or four years older than me.

"Haven't you heard? He's got seven different girls pregnant, right now, as we speak."

"You're kidding."

The informer shook hi head. "Gospel."

It took me some effort to digest this information, not least because I did not think that there were seven girls one would want to ball in the whole town, much less impregnate. Still, the code in those days said a feat was a feat; so, no matter what you thought about it, you had to reckon with it.

As the day wore on, I found myself working shoulder to shoulder with Jonny. He was wearing sunglasses and a sleeveless tee shirt, so he had some style. He spoke first, a friendly challenge of sorts. Soon we were talking, I do not remember what about, and, after a little, since the mood was open, I had to inquire.

"I heard something." Well, I had just met the guy, so a cautious start seemed best.

"Yeah?" He struck the earth without looking up.

"Yeah."

"What'd ya hear?"

I let a few seconds pass, then said: "Oh, you know how everyone is."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Well?"

"Hell, it can't be right."

At this point, Jonny stood upright and pushed his sunglasses upon his nose, saying nothing.

"I mean, is it possible?" I asked this because "Alfie," with Michael Caine, was a year or more away from the local theatre.

"Is what possible?" From his intonation, I knew that he knew what I was thinking. The rumor was that he would marry soon, shotgun and all.

"You know, seven. Seven pregnant at one time?"

"Shit," he said and returned to hoeing. "That's nothin'. Seven days in a week, man."

I thought about that one a long while.

\*\*\*\*\*

USCatholic on-line has an article concerned with the current rehabilitation, from harlot to apostle, of Mary Magdalene. The church is finally admitting there is no evidence to support that Mary fit Pope Gregory VI's description. While this metamorphosis is underway, the Vatican must be hoping that parishioners will forget, at least for the moment, that the Pope is infallible in matters of faith and morals.

\*\*\*\*\*

A scientist would hardly claim the infallibility of a Pope. On the contrary, there is pride in emphasizing that theories are provisional. In print, however, some scientists proceed as if theories were established facts, never mind a claim to the possession of provisional knowledge only.

\*\*\*\*\*

I awoke early this morning, as in 3 AM, and so decided to surf the Internet. Why not. Anyway, I went from Ibiza to Clifford Irving to Crime Library and then thought of the Colorado 6<sup>th</sup> District. I typed in my old judge's name and found a reversal from the Court of Appeals, 1999. I also found an obituary from 2004, stating that Senior Judge Al H. Haas had died at home on 30 October, at the age of 80. Well, his health was not good when I clerked for him, so I expected to find this. Still, it's oddly unsettling. I liked the man quite a lot. He had been in North Africa and Sicily with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry and was appointed to the bench by Governor Lamm.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's been a year since I last wrote anything in this so-called daybook. Maybe in the days to follow, assuming there are days to follow, I will write about everything that has transpired – the death of a friend, the floods throughout the northern provinces, the whole nine meters – but, just now, something else is on my mind.

I've begun reading The Guardian online after a long period of avoiding news media. Things have changed since I last paid attention, but not along surprisingly new lines. Of course, there's the Middle East. Not to worry, though, because a permanent solution may be at hand: Arctic tundra is releasing methane as the icecap melts, algal

bloom is killing wildlife along the waterways, hatch-rates for several species of bird are below normal (for example, albatross are hovering at 40%), frogs are dying everywhere, refuse is floating out to Midway Island, oceans are warming and so frozen gasses on the floor may be released... it goes on and on.

Not so many years ago, pollution was 'exaggerated' and global warming was a myth, according to some paid experts. Those who suggested otherwise were given various disparaging labels. But not even neo-cons can deny what's happening now.

Meanwhile, people in Surrey are worried about watering lawns during the current heatwave. The upside is that UK has warmed enough that people on holiday feel less need to visit the Mediterranean. Presumably, this will lower air traffic and so lower pollution from jet fuel in the upper atmosphere.

Too little, too late.

\*\*\*\*\*

Long haul but it finally clicked this morning. Night Fishing at Giverny. It's now clearer to me that two different but overlapping 'themes' are involved. In the past few months, trying to sort things out, I've stretched a large canvas that remains untouched; painted three canvases that were painted over or burned immediately; done numerous cubistic doodles; and, now, have a Monet-like diptych underway – a study, as it turns out, for the large canvas (used later as dependencies).

So, the large canvas is to be about memory and mimesis, and it feels as if 'night fishing' could be the summation of a line of thought that has occupied me, in various ways, for many years. This interests me mainly because, not long ago, I made a conscious decision to begin working away from 'postmodern irony' (for want of a term), and now here comes this thing that can't be anything else but.

\*\*\*\*\*

[Knowing you've got nothing better to do, here are excerpts from an analysis of the surrealist manifestoes that a curator sent to me, followed by responses. Mine, that is.]

**"To describe every act condemned by law as Surrealist would serve in the first instance to point up the universality of alienation, the fact that people are never truly themselves but rather that everyone acts for the most part in accordance with the inhuman tendencies instilled in them by social conditioning."**

It seems to me that a reaction against all social conditioning is a response completely determined by that conditioning. In effect, a mirror image. Beyond that, the statement implies that, were it not for social conditioning, there would be no inhuman tendencies, because such tendencies are instilled. This is the nature / nurture conundrum. Such tendencies could be learned, or they could stem from original sin, or they could be encoded in DNA – assuming, from the get-go, that we can agree upon a definition of 'inhuman tendency' and identify those elements that constitute social conditioning. Meanwhile:

**"The simplest Surrealist act consists in dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd."**

Conventionally, this suggestion might be construed as a philosophical exercise, as theatre veritas, as psychological disorder (that is, a chemical imbalance resulting from too much sugar in the diet); or, worst case, as a pathological behavior. None of these rises to the dignity of 'inhuman tendency'. But perhaps that phrase is beside the point, because:

**"...such an act would simply be a way of making all the workings of an economic and social system which kills human beings by reducing them to the state of objects clear and comprehensible to everyone."**

One must admit the attractiveness of this explanation, except for the simple-minded objection that it is not possible to accomplish this end without reducing a crowd to the state of objects (targets). Perhaps this is the nature of object lessons. Still, unless the gunman wears a tee shirt labeled 'workings of the economic and social system', the crowd is unlikely to understand the allegorical significance of catching a bullet or to appreciate its educational value.

Putting education aside, if such an act is neither art nor anti-art, and is merely an expression of meaninglessness, then it is a parasitic contradiction, because it is dependent upon an affirmative action directed toward a nihilistic end. So why bother. Why even bother to say it.

\*\*\*\*\*

According to the January 2006 issue of the Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society:

The number of papers and books included in the Mathematical Review's database since 1940 is now more than 1.9 million, and more than 75 thousand items are added to the database each year. The overwhelming majority of works contain new mathematical theorems and their proofs.

It may take me a while to get caught up.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's a common criticism that American television is geared to the mentality of a twelve-year old. This claim is in contrast with the Mercury Theatre broadcast of "Rebecca" from 1938. An interview with Orson Welles begins the program. Among other things, he says that he hopes to bring quality drama to the airwaves, even though radio is geared to the mentality of an eight-year old.

So, there it is. Apparently public education is working.

\*\*\*\*\*

Gödel's first incompleteness theorem: Every sufficiently powerful axiomatic system has undecidable formulae.

Gödel's second incompleteness theorem: There are always true theorems which cannot be proven.

Gardner's Corollary: There are false theorems that cannot be disproven, the strength of the axiomatic system notwithstanding.

\*\*\*\*\*

Neuroscience is to Freudian psychology as biochemistry is to alchemy.

\*\*\*\*\*

In 2004, the BBC broadcast a two-part biocudrama (excuse the locution) deconstructing Michelangelo. It's interesting for at least two reasons: 1) presenting new information about finances, from which information it becomes possible to gauge the (in)accuracy of certain statements that Michelangelo made to his biographer; 2) manipulating revised perceptions and attitudes about his personality.

No one needs to remind us that Michelangelo was terribly ambitious, or that he was driven, self-absorbed, and not entirely truthful about slaving away alone in the Sistine. But I doubt he was the cheeky rock star bad boy portrayed in the BBC film. The monologues are atrocious, with peculiarly British turns of phrase pawned off as fact. Meanwhile, on the documentary side, one of two painting experts who reproduce The Creation of Adam refers to the two fingers meeting as "the cliché." The remark says much about this film. While reproductions and parodies of this image may be clichés, the Sistine fresco itself certainly was not and is not.

My guess is that Michelangelo was neither the secular "saint" of tradition nor was he the retooled egomaniacal "star" of this BBC bio-flick. I suspect he and his work will continue just as Shakespeare survives bad productions.

\*\*\*\*\*

Epiphany. The 7 O'clock News has covered a story about obesity among lap dogs. A videotape showed a dachshund wearing a life vest while walking a treadmill submerged in water to a depth equal to the height of the pooch's legs. The apparatus was inside a modified fish tank, equipped with monitors and screens. Four people were in attendance, including three staffers dressed in white and one doting owner. Apparently there is concern that the dog's cholesterol is a bit high.

\*\*\*\*\*

Last night, I had one of those evenings. Why I was invited to join this particular dinner party, I cannot say. The guests were a family of seven that divides its time between the Bermudas, Hawaii, London, and an estate in France. They speak four or five languages. The patriarch is a charming fellow ('charm is always something of a racket' -- Greene) and adept at sentences such as: "My friend Warren Buffet was playing golf the other day with Tiger Woods, and they agreed to a thousand a hole for each others' favorite charity..." I was right in my element.

Anyway, Francois, the patriarch, spent most of the evening speaking directly to me, across another guest. He told me stories about art and artists. I mention this because every expose' I have ever read about auctions, collectors, agents, and curators was confirmed. Of course, he himself paints -- every time he takes a class in watercolor. I appreciated his honesty. I reciprocated by saying that I know of a fellow from Colorado who wants to turn golf courses into housing estates.

Actually, I liked the guy.

\*\*\*\*\*

I just gave a moment's thought to why this mss is progressing so slowly; that is to say, why I have made so few entries these past three years. Enough time has passed for me to see that I have stopped reading, by which I mean to say 'every day' -- or even every week.

Some months before I stopped reading, I stopped writing. I no longer love books; or rather love has turned to disappointment. But this is personification, isn't it. I suppose the simple truth is that I no longer expect to encounter anything new, or I no longer find novelty, in itself, to be of much interest -- or perhaps novelty is simply the concern of youth. Seeking novelty, anyway.

Apparently, I am no longer willing to give books the time they require. Part of me says this is regrettable, and that I may be missing out. Another part of me says there might be a marginally new style of writing or means of turning a phrase, but it's varnish and veneer.

Although books can explore topics in greater depth than any other medium known to me, the facts they impart -- sorry, 'information' -- read like factoids that in time will change. Please, an example? Oh, say our definition of what is a planet and just how many the solar system happens to encompass.

Encompass? Wrong verb, as it implies concentric orbits. Well, fuck all. The point is, I think such ennui is what it means to grow older. One is no longer quite so impressed by what meets the eye -- and that includes the printed page, no matter the typeface, the freshness of the dust cover, the odor of the paper, or the rigidity of the spine.

Presumably, such an attitude will prove lethal to this painter. Then again, it might be only a passing phase.

But I doubt it.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was lying on the floor, when it began to roil. At first I thought it was dizziness, except I did not feel dizzy. Then, it became my imagination. I sat up, spread my hands out, and the floor still moved. It did not shake, it rolled, and it lasted a minute, maybe longer. This was yesterday, about four o'clock in the afternoon. This morning, Janjira told me that there had been an earthquake in Laos yesterday, about 6 on the Richter scale. I asked what time did it occur, and she said 4 p.m. That was the same time I was stretched out upon the floor, after I stopped painting. I asked if she had felt anything at that time, and I told her about the floor rolling. She said no.

\*\*\*\*\*

This morning I thought I would try my hand at writing the world's first Italianate limerick:

Passolini and Fellini had a falling out  
When Linguine di Rimini caused a shouting bout  
Over butter sauce with garlic  
Rank and rancid, causing colic,  
Inflammini intestini, and a spell of gout.

Well, what do you want for 8:00 on Sunday morning?

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I'm extremely worried that Lindsay Lohan might never make another movie. I had never heard of this drunken driver until a week ago, but now there is such concern surrounding her in the media that I realize the depth of my distraction and ignorance. It's what I get for wasting time wondering whether the New-Look Congress would cave in over deadlines and funding. Starting today, she's my favorite poster girl.

\*\*\*\*\*

Just completed five paintings called "TRJCTRY." The set is semi-autobiographical in the sense of a road not taken. J-M Basquiat, of course, did go down the road. He and a couple others were making their presence felt when I stopped reading the art press in 1982, the year I visited the Boone and Castelli galleries. I came away thinking that it was a good thing Schnabel was working so large, otherwise his stuff would have had little presence. However, in 1995 he did make a very fine film about his friend Basquiat. Frankly, I like some of Basquiat's work quite a lot, but have been turned off a long time by the machinery surrounding it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Treadwell of Assisi.

After dinner last night, Richard Lair sent me home with "Grizzly Man" and a novel entitled "The Yellow House." The latter is a retelling of what happened between Van Gogh and Gauguin at Arles. As to Herzog's film, I sent this email to Lair just moments ago:

"Wild, primordial nature is where he felt truly at home" -- at least until the cute little red fox ran off with his baseball cap. Treadwell's well-intentioned, misguided, nearly schizoid disconnection from reality (?) seems to be the true subject of Herzog's film. More precisely, the documentary is about how one may come to believe in, and be swallowed by, a self-perpetuated image -- a study, then, in delusional obsessions, or obsessive delusions. The real tragedy, it seems to me, is the Grizzly Man's mauled girlfriend, whose fatal flaw was her love for the maker of a fractured self-image.

Go save bears that are under protection. Save the bears? No, just leave them alone. They'll shift for themselves, with no thanks to poachers, ecologists, and park rangers, when everyone leaves them alone. Unfortunately, that's the rub. No one will leave bears alone.

Herzog remarks a difference between Treadwell and himself. He states that, whereas Treadwell saw bears as family and friends, he saw only an implacable animal foraging for food in an indifferent universe. If so, this makes me different from either, because I see both. This world is a senselessly cruel place in which dolphins sometimes carry drowning humans to shore or a she-wolf might suckle a boy -- a world with Hitler and Mother Teresa. I see paradox.

On a personal note, the documentary aggravated my impatience with words and phrases that derive from the American Metaphysical Circus, delivered with a pop cultural intonation. It grates the ears, proof positive that I qualify as an old fart.

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Ingmar Bergman has died.

Under language and reality, physicians and spin doctors: Chief Justice Roberts has suffered his second 'isolated' seizure.

\*\*\*\*\*

I've been reading through this text, becoming re-acquainted with entries made 3-4 years ago. I've come away with an impression. If sanity means thinking along lines that bound a consensual norm, then I am barmy. Definitely one of Nietzsche's bungled and botched.

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Are you up for a little light reading? This is the start of Project Gutenberg's Human Genome Supplemental Data:

```
GATCACAGGTCTATCACCTATTAACCACTCACGGGAGCTCTCCATGCAT
TTGGTATTTTCGTCTGGGGGGTGTGCACGCGATAGCATTGCGAGACGCTG
GAGCCGGAGCACCTATGTCGCAGTATCTGTCTTTGATTCCCTGCCTCATT
CTATTATTTATCGCACCTACGTTCAATATTACAGGCCGAACATACCTACTA
AAGTGTGTTAATTAATTAATGCTTGTAGGACATAATAATAACAATTGAAT
GTCTGCACAGCCGCTTTCCACACAGACATCATAACAAAAAATTTCCACCA...
```

[It goes on like this for another 1,792 pages, until...]

```
...GCGGGCGTTACGGGCGGCCAGGGTTGAGTCCCGGGTCGGGGCCGGGGGA
TTGCCGGCGCATCACGGCCGAGGGCTAGGAGTGGCGGGGCCATGAGGGAG
GACGGACGTCAAAGAGGAGCACGCAGGGGGCGCCAAACCCACACTGGGCT
ACAACACTTAGTGATGAGGTGTAGGATGAAGAAGGAAAGGTCGTGACCCG
CCGGACGATAGCAGCAGCGCGCGTATAGAGGAAGGGCCACGCGCACGCTG
GGCGGCACCGTGCGAACTGTCGAAATCGTACCGGGGGCGGCCGGGCAGTC
CCGACAGAAGCCACTACCGAGAAGTAAAGCGAGCGGACGCCGGATAGCCG
CTGTGGAGTGGCGCAGCCGGCAACG
```

And that's the end of Project Gutenberg's Human Genome Supplemental Data. Book review to follow.

\*\*\*\*\*

I downloaded the Genome Project Supplement because I wanted to see what's what and because the file was only 860KB in zip format. Compare that with the file for Genome Project 01 at 65-point-something megabytes.

Late afternoon. I downloaded Genome Project's file for Chromosome 01 in zip-format, which took three hours and forty-four minutes. When I unzipped it, the text file was too big for Note Pad and Word-Pad. So, I tried MS Word and voila... 32,776 pages. Today is 5 September 2007.



ACATATATAGATTTGGAGATTTACAAGGCTATGTGTTGTGATCAGCTTCTAAAA  
GCAGATGGTCCTGGAGGGAGGGAGTGGCCTTCCAAAGCAGGCAGGTCTCTGG  
GGACCCATTTCATTTACCTTCACCCACCAGGGATAGAAAGAGG... it's mind-  
boggling.

\*\*\*\*\*

The classic line is "We had to burn the village in order to save it." But the former president of Mexico, Vincente Fox, is doing the best he can do with limited means:

"Affection for my country obliges me to remain close to the people in Mexico and abroad to help them."

\*\*\*\*\*

Years ago, when I was studying religious matters, I encountered the notion that this world is in its present state as a result of sin following from the issue of sovereignty. That's the most compact summation I can muster. Well, this morning I passed a man on the sidewalk. He was lying at the foot of steps leading up to a bank. I have seen him before, but I am unsure when or where. He cannot speak coherently, or perhaps he is shy in the way Mr. Merrick must have been. Anyway, he is dirty and miserable and drools from the corner of his mouth. He was stretched out on his side, his more or less worthless legs and feet folded under him. There were scales on his face, dried pinkish scales. He had a small plastic bag of sticky rice, and I think that I did not understand he had offered me some of it. Worse, I may have humiliated him when I stuffed a couple bills in his pocket without accepting his offer of rice in return. I just didn't get it, until hours later. Just now, in fact.

So, we have wars, hate, murders, incest, rape, thievery, greed and deformities owing to sin. And all this is allowed to continue "for a time" because the issue of sovereignty is not yet concluded. Whatever.

This morning reminded me of a leper I encountered in Chiang Mai maybe two or three years ago. Disease, too, is allowed to exist until the issue of sovereignty is settled.

I no longer think that any amount of suffering can be justified theologically. For me, it simply does not explain two miserable human lives I have passed on sidewalks. Since this morning, I have tried to keep busy, but the whole time I have wanted to scream something like 'screw both sides of the issue' and the horses they rode in on.

One might think that 6 million Jews, and perhaps an additional 8 to 14 million others, would have given me pause before now. It has, of course, but without any immediacy. Maybe the reason there is a lack of immediacy is that I have not encountered 6 million Jews. I have only encountered one man with leprosy and another who has worthless legs and scales on his face. And, when I met the latter, I did not have the presence of mind to understand that he was offering me rice.

\*\*\*\*\*

This morning, I played a line new to me -- Italian opening, Evans gambit -- the one Anderssen used against Dufresne 150 years ago. Of course, my computer is smarter than to continue with Dufresne's defense, as many variations have been worked out since they played in Berlin. Still, I've apparently found two new wrinkles, one winning in 25 moves and the other in 35. Haven't done that in a number of years -- not since I happened upon the Queen's Fianchetto. Anyway, it helps to offset the beatings I have lately suffered. Yes,

that is the word... suffered. But for every pawn captured, ten will rise in its place. Vive la France! -- although the French defense is approximately as effective as the Maginot line.

\*\*\*\*\*

In her teens, Mary Cassatt could not wait to get away from the USA and go to Europe. When she returned home for a few months, she could not wait to return to Europe. She wrote to a friend that it was unfortunate she had been born an American. Years later, at the age of sixty or so, she received a visitor and said something like: "You're an American, I take it. I don't like Americans, but we can sit and talk for awhile." Nevertheless, Mary Cassatt was a real patriot -- according to someone from the Art Institute of Chicago, because... the biography entitled Mary Cassatt: A Brush With Independence was funded by a foundation and produced in 2002, shortly after the events of 11 September 2001.

\*\*\*\*\*

How to explain why I am becoming more reclusive of late. It's a combination of avoiding people and nonsense that drain or waste my energy and time. Really, it's anything that keeps me from working in quiet sunlight. It's interesting and compelling how sunlight, of itself, has gained in importance as the years pass, especially as I recognize my circumstances for what they are.

I have been coming to this point for thirty-five years, have probably learned everything I will ever learn, managed to unlearn some of it, and it is doubtful I will get any better as a painter. So what remains is to focus as best I can, for however much longer I am able. It may be for a year or another five years, or it may end tomorrow. One always hopes it's not to end right now.

Everything is contingent, in my experience, and it's rare for conditions to be conducive. It's rare for ideas, concentration, mood, materials, and unobstructed opportunity to come together, so many factors conspire against their conjunction. I cannot count how many times in past years I have been derailed by one thing or another.

For the past six years, I have been able to paint more or less continuously, thanks to Janjira's patience when I stopped teaching, and then the generosity of my patron in Colorado. I have been given a chance to sort things out, to reclaim skills, to speak the language of painting with less verbiage. I am in conducive circumstances and a race against time. This is it.

Who knows whether I will ever do the one good painting I set out to do, so many years ago -- that justification on canvas that might hang in a favorable balance against one's failings, that explains to oneself why one has lived the way one has lived. Somehow, it still feels as if it could happen tomorrow, if only I would show up.

\*\*\*\*\*

Today is 11 March 2008, so the entry above may have been written last year, I think. Anyway, last November I applied to the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. At the time, I put my chances of being considered seriously at 5%. Here is the cover letter I submitted:

I have been painting professionally thirty-five years and, in all that time, never supposed that there would come a day when I would need to apply to a foundation. Such are time and circumstance. Of the one hundred or so foundations I have reviewed, I have decided to approach Pollock-Krasner.

My professional life has not followed the usual trajectory. In thirty-five years, I have done only two solo exhibitions. [Actually three -- I forgot one.] I have entered only two competitive exhibitions at consecutive biennials at a single venue, taking the judges' prize on the first occasion while being rejected on the second. Participation in small group exhibitions occurs every three years or so, with the most recent being last year, when a museum displayed one of my 'forgeries'. I keep no reliable record of my work, and the slides submitted with this application are the first made since the 1980s. At present, no gallery represents me.

I have lived in Thailand since 1990. For the past four years, I have been supported by a patron in Colorado who saw my public murals and then made contact via the Internet. I mention this because my work divides evenly between murals and easel paintings. Since 1972, I have painted 18 public and 7 private murals of which perhaps half are extant. I may have completed 300 easel paintings, I can only estimate. One reason my production is low has to do with the occasional need to work as a restorer, a law clerk, or a teacher. Another reason is that I write, although only one of four novels has been published.

By the way, I have yet to write an artist's statement. Of course, with this application, I need to say something about my painting. When my critics are kind, they call it pastiche. I suppose that is accurate enough. If memory serves, I have been doing 'multi-images' since 1969. These days, I suppose it could be labeled 'postmodern' -- or at least that is how Thai artists who visit my studio see it. From time to time, when I feel the need, I do straight representational work which, to me, is not far removed. Over the years, there has been a continuing influence from the abstract expressionists and neo-dadaists; however, my ends are different. Every brushstroke, including those that are automatic, is mediated. I will not take your time, here and now, to explain what I mean by that, as it appears to me beyond the scope of a cover letter. Were you to ask me to describe myself, I would tell you that I am not particularly original. Rather, I am a synthesizer.

I am applying to the Pollock-Krasner Foundation for two reasons. The first, of course, is simply to continue working -- especially should the second reason come to nothing. That reason has to do with mounting an exhibition of past and present work in Santa Monica, California, perhaps a year from now. For me, considering my income and the rate of exchange, the expense of mounting such an exhibition is prohibitive.

Why Santa Monica? I am a native of Southern California, I have a contact there, and it's time to 'return home'. Any additional information that PKF's board requires in view of this proposed exhibition will be supplied promptly.

At this juncture, I do not know what else to say, because you surely know why I am writing. I have no money, no savings, no insurance, and no retirement. I am not even certain whether I have forty quarters toward social security. Somewhere, Rose Selavy must be smiling like Mona Lisa. Best regards and many thanks for considering this application, [signature]

PKF's letter of rejection arrived two or three days ago. I was momentarily disappointed, but my expectations were low, low, low, so it did not take long for me to begin deconstructing the letter. It states that the grants are competitive -- of course -- and that the rejection was not predicated upon the quality of work or the financial need. Of course, these factors are

stated elsewhere to be the main considerations in making the awards. So, if it is not a question of quality or need, and the selection process is competitive, then there is another factor, unstated, in play. If it's not politics or nepotism, then it can only be the resume. I knew this before I submitted, as well. I took the time to fill out PKF's forms as Vincent van Gogh might have done. Frankly, his vita were even less impressive than my own scant listings -- he took two beginners courses and failed entrance exams, sold a single painting just before he died, and so on. I can't help but wonder what the Board of Directors would have made of his application.

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The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sales Agreement was drafted and published in 1971 by Seth Siegelaub, with the assistance of a lawyer. Being in Colorado, maybe I came across it a year later and had an immediate visceral reaction. I thought it was crassly commercial. Then, upon a moment's reflection, I thought it might be a satire, especially considering that, around that time, Siegelaub was organizing exhibitions that existed only as catalogs. That is, the catalog became the commodified object. Once you understood the concept and/or the joke, that's all there was, so I soon forgot about the Agreement.

Fast forward thirty-six years to the present, when I am trying to write a little story called *Spanish to My Horse*. This story has required research for several reasons. One reason is that it is set in 1999, in Basel and in New York. It is a story about fraud. Part of the fraud is that I have been to Manhattan only once and never to Basel. I know next to nothing about either place, but the narrator of the story knows quite a lot. So the idea is to perpetrate a fraud upon the reader while the characters are perpetrating frauds upon one another. While doing research into events of 1999, I learned that Daniel Buren was to appear at the Basel Art Fair. Of course, he was published in one of Siegelaub's catalogs that same year. Following the leads, I re-encountered The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sales Agreement, together with a 1999 interview with Siegelaub in which he says that the Agreement was not intended as a satire. It merely reflected practices within the art world at the time, and it tried to protect the artists from the collectors and gallerists.

Well, surprise, little has changed. The point is that my perception of the Agreement has changed, that's all. Since I read it in 1972 or thereabouts, I have worked as a law clerk to a district court judge and taken a Masters in interdisciplinary humanities (read, literary theory -- deconstruction and the rest). What the Agreement does, perhaps unintentionally, is to describe and codify relationships between producers and consumers in a laissez-faire capitalist economy. It describes shark-infested waters, then. The only fault I see with the document is that Siegelaub forgot to provide for adjustable interest rates during the period artists are waiting to be paid royalties.

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8 May 2008 -- Yesterday, Janjira turned fifty, and I finished the third version of *Shalott* (LS3). In the afternoon, Sirina and Saksith came to photograph it. In the evening, Janjira and I had dinner with Lance and Parn Bird, at their new home. This morning Parn came again to sit for her portrait. Fourth or fifth sitting, so she's been more reliable than most. Today, however, she couldn't stay still for more than a minute. She's very conversational. After she left, I looked at the mural. There is always a let down at the end of a project, but this one is different. I'm not happy with LS3, as I was not pleased with the two previous

versions. I never will be. Beyond that, I feel it may be my last painting for K.D. It really does feel like the end of the line, somehow.

Janjira says the count in Myanmar is now over 100,000 dead, with more expected. Meanwhile, the northern provinces here in Thailand are expecting heavy storms tomorrow. I hear the thunder tonight already. Last Saturday I was in Chiang Mai and saw the Ping River, up to its banks. It will not take any more water, as I write. Here we go again.

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Especially today, I am feeling out of the loop. Can't summon the wherewithal to read cybernews about banks or the Burmese junta. Last night, I forced myself to slog through a few pages of Pascal's *Pensees*. Why would anyone do that? Well, I audited a discussion of Pascal that came with a DVD -- Rohmer's 'My Night at Maud's'. So, after downloading an e-text, I read the first and second sections. I wouldn't bet on my making it through Section 3, The Necessity of the Wager. Here's a sample aphorism, so you'll understand my problem:

24 Language. -- "We should not turn the mind from one thing to another, except for relaxation, and that when it is necessary and the time suitable, and not otherwise."

I take it Pascal wrote this book for relaxation, because in the opening pages he manages to turn from nature to truth, art, error, language, mathematics, word order, writing a book, dull minds, hydrostatics, Christianity, Scaramouche, Epictetus, Montaigne, Plato, and Salomon de Tultie. Of course, to be fair, he is discussing two basic kinds of intelligence, as he sees them -- and he musters as many examples as he can. Still...

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Then, there's Holbach/Voltaire/"Meslier": "Evidence can be relied on only when confirmed by the constant testimony of **our senses, which alone give birth to ideas**, and enable us to judge of their conformity or of their incompatibility."

[If senses alone give birth to ideas, where did the idea of God come from?]

"Ask him what he means by a spirit? He will answer, that it is an unknown substance, which is perfectly simple, which has nothing tangible, nothing in common with matter. In good faith, is there any mortal who can form the least idea of such a substance? A spirit in the language of modern theology is then but **an absence of ideas. The idea of spirituality is another idea without a model.**"

[Apparently, our senses give birth to ideas without models.]

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My interest in forgery has finally come home. It's ironic, even poetic. Janjira and I are the victims of a falsified document. The document is signed and sealed, and it originates with the Land Office of Lampang Province. It sets forth the value of a particular piece of land

at 1,000 Baht per square wah (roughly two square meters). This valuation was made in 2004, a few weeks (supposedly) before we purchased the land described therein. And as usual, time passes. The value of land surrounding the property has risen. Consequently, we were surprised to learn, when we asked for certification of the current value, that the price is now 500 Baht per square wah. It was that price four years ago, when the Land Office issued the first valuation. Apparently, a bureaucrat was on friendly terms with the seller, a rather nice woman known to have financial difficulties from time to time. The nice woman is an old acquaintance of Janjira's mother, while her daughter is, like me, a former member of the faculty at Yonok University. In a way, it's all in the family.

Well, Janjira and I were cheated out of 250,000 Baht. At this time, we could use the money and we had hoped to sell the land. Imagine our surprise. Now we know, but the nice woman does not know that we know. Nor does the bureaucrat, who has been transferred to another district, know that we know.

What to do? The case would take 3-5 years to decide and considerable time and attorney fees. Beyond that, the schmuck at the Land Office supports a family and has kids in school, while the nice woman continues to have financial troubles. So why ruin lives?

There are really only two aspects to consider. The first is how to stop the schmuck from falsifying other documents without embarrassing him publicly. There's no reason his family should suffer, if he changes his behavior. After all, it may have been a one-time scam, to help a friend. Had Janjira and I built a house upon the land and lived there 30 years, we would never have noticed we paid more than twice the price. In fact, at the time, we were happy to get the land for what we paid.

The other aspect is that, once again, we can not do what we intend to do. In 1997, George Soros wiped us out when he and Joe Lewis and a third 'financier' raided the Asian economy. This time, we got scammed, just when we need to think seriously about building a permanent place. C'est la vie.

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I'm trying to understand the game.

Hedge funds are a real treat. To be a member, you must be invited. They are limited to 100 people whose annual income must be either 1 million or 5 million (depending on the source). Hedge funds are not regulated in any meaningful sense, they are not transparent, and they receive preferential treatment. They are permitted to practice "late-trading" which is illegal for everyone else. They buy on the margin, using borrowed funds to create leverage in short selling, in which case they make a great deal of money but pay no taxes because they have not generated a "taxable event."

Hedge funds have caused the current economic woes around the world; they caused the dot-com meltdown; they were largely responsible for the late-80s recession; and some believe that certain of their practices brought on the 1930s depression.

The members of hedge funds may be individuals or institutions. They run the show. The rest of us pick up their miscues -- through bailouts and devalued currencies.

Why am I interested? I am thinking of doing a large painting of these guys -- a group portrait -- based upon Rembrandt's Syndics of the Drapers' Guild. In order to paint Soros, Klarman, Kravis & Co, I need to know what they do.

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while walking home from madison elementary in redondo beach, i saw a hearse pass. emblazoned on the glass of the rear door, in palace script, was the word GOODBYE. it must have been the name of a mortuary, pronounced good-bee. so much for show and tell. otherwise, according to arthur wood in my third grade class: "five jets crashed in mid-air... and no one was hurt."

ohhh, sit down, arthur. jesus. give us a break, will ya. and mrs george standing patiently, looking like she's heard it before.

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I've just received images of a new war ship made of steel from the World Trade Center. On the side is emblazoned "Never Forget." Some, no doubt good Christians, described touching the ship as a spiritual experience. It is to be used to seek out and destroy terrorists, so I suppose it is a symbolic way to get revenge of land-locked seafarers. But something about peoples' reverence for that ship puts me in mind of Hitler's Blood Flag. I can't shake it. So, a bloodflag ship. If "we" were going to show "them" what we are made of, we might have used the steel to put up another structure where stood the Trade Center - a hospital or library or sculpture park. But no, rather give us weaponry every time.

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An e-pistle to Bill Sharp:

This morning I happened upon Bepe Colli's review of Half A True Day, an interesting piece, although I disagree with him about Suzanne Lewis. Both she and Genevieve were good choices and perfect for BIOTA. As you know, Colli also wrote:

"Not really a step forward, Almost Never (1992) was a step sideways: the amount of space given to James Gardner's flugelhorn - and the fact that Gardner wrote some pieces on his own - made it impossible for the listener not to think about some Davis pages."

Davis pages. Colli may well be right. There is, however, a background story, and I hope it's not too tedious for you to read.

I studied trumpet formally from age ten to age thirteen. I had two instructors, a Mr. Van Dyke, who wanted me to switch over to trombone because of my 'embouchure'; and Mr. Best, who played reed instruments in Mid-west dance bands during the swing era. Herein, the keyword is 'embouchure'. I was roundly criticized for being unable to produce a proper sound on the trumpet. It is the reason for Van Dyke wanting me to play trombone or tuba instead. He even suggested French horn, which I tried, but the sound was even more displeasing to his ear.

At that time, the players I knew were Louis Armstrong, Harry James, Al Hirt, Rafael Mendez (by name only -- never heard him play) and the Dukes of Dixieland. Well, one evening, after hide and seek, I came into the house while the radio was on. No one was listening; everyone was outside. I was immediately transfixed by the strangest sounds ever. I stopped, sat on the floor and listened to a trumpeter who sounded as bad as I did,

only this guy was making it work. At the end, the announcer said the song was "Solea" from Sketches of Spain. And the trumpeter was named Miles Davis. In 1962, I had never heard of him.

The next day I found a record shop on (then) Redondo Beach Blvd and asked about the album by Miles Davis. I was pretty sure no one would understand my inquiry, but the salesman said "Ah, that's a good one" and took me right to it. He congratulated me on my taste and then introduced me to Dave Brubeck's Take Five. So there went six weeks' allowance. As it happened, my teachers were less than enthusiastic about my discoveries. Before long, I was hooked and decided to develop as best I could with the embouchure I had. Perhaps more to the point, I absolutely absorbed Davis' sense of phrasing, because there was an exact correspondence between his approach and my emotional makeup -- mercurial for a certainty, and dead center.

In the next seven years, I must have purchased 30 to 35 albums from Miles Davis, even after my mother remarried and moved me to Colorado. What a place that was, in 1964. I had to order albums and wait two weeks. About this time, I took up flugelhorn, because I liked the sound from Davis' Quiet Nights.

Time to shorten this story. By the time I was 21, I put my horns aside because the way I played naturally was too close to Miles Davis, and I could do nothing about it except surgery. Davis came first, and he had managed to forge a style based on his limitations. Moreover, he was a better musician than I would ever be. And the final straw, after performing publicly three or four times, I discovered my aversion to being on stage. So that was that, until Almost Never. Tom invited me to play with BIOTA, and I decided what the hell, took the horns out of mothballs, and practiced for six weeks before recording. The rest, as they say, is revisionist history. Funny, don't you think? Even ridiculous, perhaps.

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13 August 2008 -- Today, Josh Plotkin and Richard Lair began conducting tests for assessing the intelligence of elephants. In the test, two elephants worked together by pulling opposite ends of a rope that had been fed through a conduit, like a belt passing through the loops of trousers. The conduit ran around three sides of a sled. On the sled were basins filled with corn. In order to eat the corn, the elephants had to pull the sled toward themselves. Without cooperation, one elephant would have pulled the rope through, to no avail. To move the sled at all, the pair must pull simultaneously.

It did not take long for the pair to work together, and so they were able to eat lots of corn. However, Josh was not satisfied. For reasons unclear to me, he felt that the elephants were not really solving a problem. He and Richard will be figuring out how to arrange a clear necessity, and the sessions will continue.

I shot about 200 digital images of today's proceedings, using Josh's camera. I told him that cameras have an aversion to me, so Josh said 'just point and shoot'. Richard, as always, was more helpful. He said the camera was idiot-proof.

Before this afternoon's tests, Richard and I painted with elephants. It was our third session in the past two weeks. It rained this morning and we did not get underway until after ten o'clock. Usually we begin painting around 8:00-8:30. Saying this, it sounds as if



we paint with elephants all the time. In fact, we do not. Our last set of sessions was three years ago.

14 August 2008 -- An interesting afternoon at the elephant center. After several trials, mostly utter failures, the lead elephant (starting from a position staggered by ten meters) finally began to pick up one end of the rope and then wait for the other elephant to come alongside. In some cases, the lead elephant picked up the rope and pulled very lightly, a matter of perhaps 6-12 inches only, until the second elephant arrived to supply resistance by pulling the rope's other end. Then, as a pair, they pulled together forcefully. Of course, the sled moved toward them and the elephants ate corn as a reward for their efforts.

What does it mean? Are they thinking about what they are doing, solving problems, adapting to situations? It looks probable. Josh is doing his best to remain objective and skeptical, but one particular trial was so clearly a matter of one elephant waiting for the other to arrive that Josh finally said he is hopeful about the project, which will entail many more experiments over the next several months.

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Meanwhile, more murals for the patron in Colorado, who once again does not like that I am doing. We are approaching five years of this routine: I am presented a grandiose idea that cannot be contained within the space allotted to it, I adapt and paint, the patron does not like the result, I explain the built-in limitations, and then we continue. It is becoming tiresome. The project, as we have been discussing it, will require  $n+1$  more paintings to be done over a period of  $n+1$  more years, but recently there are days when I cannot see us continuing much longer.

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It must be three or four years since I made the notes below. They pertain to my days at Colorado State University, but I have yet to write anything around them. Perhaps they are not worth the effort -- but I must have thought differently at one time, so I propose to dispense with them, right now. The notes:

- 1) Douglas Leedy at CSU – theatre production – absurd?  
Tim goes onstage. "What are you doing?" I exit, after making gesture to the audience.
- 2) Music at CSU -- "Son of Cephalization"; incidental music for "Macbeth"; First Symphony; overnight "orchestration."
- 3) Tim Snode; "Captain Bizarre" as Stephen Brown called and painted him; the collaboration that was "S.T. Feldeware", and the recital with critic Anthony S. Bieda.

Firstly, these notes are a jumble set down in no particular order. Item #2, for example conflates events from 1969, 1970, and 1974. Item #1 happened, as I recall, in 1972. Item #3 happened in the period 1971-1972, just before I departed Colorado to live for a time, maybe six months, in Bloomington, Indiana. That said, let's begin with Item #3, which needs a little background.

Tim Snode and I met in 1969, in a music theory class. He was majoring in composition, while I was an interloper from the painting department. We began collaborating under the pseudonym S.T. Feldeware, a name concocted from the titles of two compositions, one written by Tim and the other by myself. If it is any indication, the T in

S.T. stands for 'Thanatopsis', Tim's setting of Cullen Bryant's poem of that name. Never mind my ridiculous title, let's just say I was in my teens.

S.T. Feldeware wrote a number of pieces: a piano sonata, an art song, a symphony, and so forth. If the piece was an arrangement for jazz ensemble, S.T. became Stu Feldware -- so you understand, already, the seriousness of the enterprise.

Usually Feldeware's compositions, notations in pencil upon a single sheet of paper with staves, were written over coffee while Tim and I sat in the overstuffed booths of the Townhouse Motel restaurant on College Avenue. Feldeware's First Symphony, for example, was written on a single sheet of paper, all the paper that either of us had carried with us. We decided it should be a symphony just after we placed an order for English muffins. So, given the limitation of a single sheet, the symphony has an introduction of one measure, a theme of one measure, a development of one measure, and recapitulation of one measure, followed by a lengthy coda.

Then there was the art song for tenor and piano, entitled 'Swan Song'. It lasts no more than 30 seconds, with these immortal lyrics:

*The swan is gone,  
The swan is gone, is gone  
The silver swan is gone, anon.*

This song will loom large, by and by, when we come to a recital attended by Anthony S. Bieda, resident critic of *The Collegian*. Then again, why not discuss it now. The order of things is really of no importance.

I had dropped out of school in the fourth year, and Tim wrote to me in Indiana, to say that a senior recital of his compositions had recently taken place. In his letter, Tim included a review written by Mr. Bieda. I read his review and was amused with the phrase, "abstracting on the bassoon" -- a perfectly serviceable phrase, so why it should have seemed so funny at the time, who can say. Tim lampooned it in his letter, and perhaps I am too suggestible. I immediately wrote a critique of the review, signed the critique S.T. Feldeware, and mailed it from the post office in Bloomington. In a few days, I received a heated reply from Mr. Bieda, who accused me of ethnocentrism. He went on to say that print was a cool medium, so if I wanted to discuss the matter with him, face to face, that could be arranged. I thought, yes, as a matter of fact, it can be arranged. This was because I had decided already to return to Colorado, when another letter from Tim arrived. Tim stated that on Friday morning convocation, two weeks hence, was scheduled the first public offering of Feldeware's 'Swan Song', to be performed by the tenor, Craig Lanning, and the pianist, Carol Tate. Wonderful, I thought, as I bought a ticket. Then I wrote to Mr. Bieda, telling him to meet me, S.T. Feldeware, in The Ramskeller at one o'clock in the afternoon of the same day.

On the Friday, I arrived at the CSU Music Building at 10 o'clock, climbed the stairs to the second floor auditorium, and met Tim. We went in together and sat down in the back row. He handed me a program, and then he pointed out that Mr. Bieda was sitting down below, front row center, reading his program. Twice, Bieda looked from side to side, then over his shoulder, then he looked again at the program. From this behavior, Tim and I drew an inference.

Three pieces were performed at convocation that morning. The first was a tired and forgettable little sonata by somebody named Spumoni or Scarlatti -- something like that. Then came J.S. Bach, ho-hum, and when it was finished, everyone clapped politely.

The third piece began with Craig Lanning walking in from the wings. He wore tails and had a large margenta poppy of papier-mache drooping from his lapel. Carol Tate

came out wearing cat's eye sunglasses, walked over to the piano and sat down primly, raising the lid. She struck the first chord sharply: Ta-daa. As Craig began to belt out *The swan is gone...* the critic from *The Collegian* once again was looking over his shoulder.

At the conclusion of S.T. Feldeware's *Swan Song*, the audience was on its feet. The roar was deafening. Mr. Bieda, however, was still sitting, and he was not clapping. Nor was he any longer looking from side to side. Tim and I shook hands, and he suggested that S.T. Feldeware need no longer meet with Mr. Bieda that afternoon. So much for that.

Many pages ago, I mentioned incidental music for a production of *Macbeth* that featured the Scottish usurper as a Latin revolutionary. I wrote the music, and Tim and I were members of the *ad hoc* ensemble that performed it. The tapes we made disappeared mysteriously, but later reappeared when the production was given a second run. Then the tapes again disappeared.

*Macbeth* was booked on the same night, at the same time, on the same stage as a multi-media work called *Son of Cephalization* that Tim and I had put together. *Son* would have made use of reading, dancing, projected images, and taped music with live performance -- but it was stillborn. We learned of the double booking after we had done the music for *Macbeth*, which, as I say, disappeared, reappeared, then re-disappeared. Well, as someone once observed, the reason there is so much double-crossing in academia is that the stakes are so low.

What else? Stephen Brown and Tim Snode roomed together on Mulberry Street. Stephen now teaches at the Hartford Art School, but while a student at CSU he painted a portrait of Tim, whom he called 'Captain Bizarre'. I wrote a portrait of Stephen, and also of Tim, both long since lost, in a style highly influenced by Gertrude Stein's portraits. I was trying to come to terms with *Tender Buttons*, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *The Making of Americans*, *Lucy Church Amiably*, *Paris France*, and *The Mother of Us All* -- not to forget *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which Stein wrote in collaboration with Virgil Thompson. "Pigeons on the grass, alas, and a magpie in the sky."

This leaves the composer Douglas Leedy, who was in residence at CSU for a time. He was quite prominent once, but now seems to be forgotten. At CSU he staged a theatre piece set in an apartment with four or five characters. There was no dialogue, just lounging around, sauntering over to a refrigerator, turning a television on and off, and so forth. Tim and two others were seated away from Lynda Negrete and myself, and they rose up from the audience after half an hour and went up on the stage. I figured they were part of the production, which was fun, but I was getting bored. I suggested to Lynda that she and I find something else to do. When we rose from our front row seats, I made an exaggerated yawn, then, as we exited, I made the classic idiot noise with a finger flapping between my lips. No doubt the audience thought that my rude noise, too, was part of the performance.

Later on, Tim told me that Leedy had asked him, "What are you doing up here [on the stage]?" Tim responded that, as the performance was obviously *avant garde*, he had assumed that audience participation would be all right, perhaps even expected. Leedy, however, was less than enthusiastic.

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Speaking of Stephen Brown, in the 1970s he painted a self-portrait after an operation for cancer, which he has been intermittently fighting all his adult life. I cannot be sure, but he may have showed me a photograph of the painting, when he and Gretchen visited Colorado in 1982 or was it 1983. It reminded me of Alice Neel's portrait of Warhol, after he had been shot. This is appropriate, in a way, because Stephen had assisted in Neel's studio and

for a time slept on her floor. She had done drawings of him, too. But whereas Neel's portrait of the badly scarred Warhol torso feels contorted, Stephen's scarred self portrait was a nude standing in a clinical northern light. Both paintings are factual assessments, but Stephen's self-portrait had overtones of Albrecht Durer. At least, that is how I recall it.

After graduation from CSU, Stephen went to Skowhegan, and from there to somewhere else where me picked up an MFA. He stayed on in New York, at a time when it was still possible to live cheaply on the island of Manhattan. I saw him there, during my only visit to NYC in 1982. I telephoned him from an apartment kept by Brandon and Lily Tartikoff, who were friends of a friend's brother. Anyway, the timing was bad and I missed, by a day or two, an exhibition of Stephen's work at a gallery in Columbus Circle. (Instead, I saw Julian Schnabel's ponderously pretentious plates at Boone-Castelli, which did not speak to me on any level except as a prime example of the power of publicity. These days, however, I do like Schnabel's films.) It was after the visit to NYC that Stephen and Gretchen came to Colorado, because he had adoptive parents in Evans, near Greeley and the University of Northern Colorado. I am not sure, but I may not have seen Stephen since. We have spoken on the telephone from time to time, after intervals of years, and we exchanged an e-mail or two sometime in the late 1990s. He suggested that we become "e-mail buddies" but never wrote. When I wrote to him, the e-mail was returned for reason that the address was invalid.

Time passed. Sometime after I took a Masters in interdisciplinary Humanities, I returned to painting and began to wonder how Stephen was doing, because I had heard he was again ill. I found his paintings on the Internet, including, to my surprise, a portrait of Gregory Gillespie. I had learned of Gillespie's work in the 1960s, when he and Nancy Grossman were featured in TIME and I was still adapting to life in Colorado. Gillespie had won a fellowship to study in Italy, he was on a roll, and it was another world. Fast forward to thirty-five years later or more, when I find his portrait painted by someone I know. So, I decided to look for Gillespie on the Internet, as well -- and I found out that he had just died. Apparently, it was a suicide. All this information came to me in a matter of minutes, like collapsing time, and it affected me strangely. I decided to write a note to a contact address at the web-site, saying that, from the hinterlands, I had appreciated Gillespie's work. Then I sent an e-mail to Stephen, using the contact address at his web-site. He wrote back in a day or two, and we ended up speaking by telephone after that. Stephen said that he and Gillespie were friends, that his death was a real loss, and that he had invited Gillespie to teach for a time at the Hartford Art School. That explained everything, or so I thought.

About a year later I received a letter from Peggy Gillespie, thanking me for what I had said about her late husband. She included an e-mail address to which I wrote about the portrait Stephen had painted. She wrote back to say that she did not know Stephen or anything about the Hartford Art School. I left it at that. How very odd, I thought, for there was clearly something on-going about which I had not a clue. Moreover, the thought occurred to me that I might have opened a rather large can of worms, however inadvertently. These days, I am sure that's the case, because not so long ago I learned that Stephen had suffered a stroke the year before. I wrote to him. "I'm still here," he replied. He said that he was 95% back to what he had been, and not a word more.

Terse, but as I had admired his recent portraits, by way of exchange I sent him two or three digital images of my own work. There has been no reply.

I am not half the painter Stephen is, but he might have said something. Silence, as always, is worse than a critique.

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By my mid-thirties, I had given most of my records to friends and nearly all of my books. I stopped buying and began borrowing from a public library. I'm in my late fifties now and have not set foot in a library in years.

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distortion  
disjunction  
compression  
conflation

These cause tension and conflict in dreams -- the need to reconcile the lie we tell to ourselves while dreaming, as we try to conform facts with the situational sequence or conditions of the dream.

For example, a dream that we are in a rural setting, and there is the house, but the water is on the wrong side of the property. We are wading in it, but the water is too deep. Yet "we" (now drops out) are standing near its edge, and a rowboat takes the bend of the inlet/outlet/stream that feeds the larger body of water -- the reservoir or lake -- and in the rowboat is Mary Senoff. [Fact: Mary was not in a rowboat, but in an Audi Fox passing on the curve of a country road where I was jogging with Jim Disney one afternoon. She stopped the car and we chatted while Jim ran on ahead, and she swept back her hair and gave me a look -- but the moment passed; I did nothing. Sweaty, hesitant, the moment passed and the small spell was broken. She drove away] -- only in the dream she rowed away over the water. And I awake because I have to urinate.

This is from the middle of the dream. In the beginning of the dream, I was in a car with Bob driving too fast. Much too fast, and I asked him please to slow down as we passed Dyekman's and Molloy's, all dislocated but placed along the too curvy and dusty lane. We were swerving and coming to the renovated farmhouse where I grew up. But the water is in front of the house, along the road, not back where it belongs on the other side of the property, in the irrigation canal running parallel to the reservoir.

I remember that discontinuities in the dream -- say, changing the Audi to a rowboat -- caused the dream to stall and gave me an uneasy feeling, while I was yet asleep. Then, by some force of will or imagination, the editor of the dream (myself, I suppose) finally placed Mary in the rowboat and made her paddle away. It was like cognitive noise or dissonance in search of resolution in the most vivid dream I can recall in a long time. And for some reason its mechanics came clear enough to enable me to write about them here.

When I was in the water, but standing briefly aside the bend of the inlet/outlet/stream, after Mary had passed in the rowboat, there was a fleshy-looking aquatic creature that swam slowly toward me then submerged, and that is when I awoke and had to urinate.

At least I woke up. When I was a boy, I used to dream that I was standing before the toilet, urinating, and then I would wake up in wet sheets. That was disorienting, to say the least.

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Pluto is no longer a planet, because the definition of 'planet' has been changed. This is the key to avoiding an economic depression -- simply change the definition of 'depression'. Time will tell.

Today's date: 23 October 2008.

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Sharon Shuster Anhorn has written to say that a feisty Scots terrier named Nicki has died. Nicki belonged to Caroline, Sharon's neighbor (mine, as well, in 2001) on Garfield Street. Whenever Caroline went skiing or camping, Nicki would take me for walks in the park across from Lake Loveland. Odd that I had forgot the little guy, until Sharon wrote, because I liked Nicki -- so it definitely says something about my memory.

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Black ice, 1977, returning from Idaho in a Porsche 911-E. I wrote this note maybe three years ago but have been steadily pushing it down the page in favor of other entries. It's time I dispense with it. Now that I have decided to do that, I cannot think why this event should have been noted at all. Ah, wait, I remember. My dying words, that's why. Here we go.

The Porsche belonged to Christian Friedrich, who had decided to attend a land auction in Sand Point, so we departed Fort Collins in fair weather and headed for Moscow, the Snake River Canyon, and Ketchum, perhaps not in that order. At a diner in Ketchum, Chris pointed across the street toward two small evergreens. There lies Hemingway, he said. We paid the check and crossed the street to stare down upon a marble slab between the two trees. It was a fine slab, black and hard, and it read Ernest Miller Hemingway.

In Moscow, we stopped at Chris's mother's house, where his grandmother, a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, gave me two tracts. At one point or another we stood at the head of the Snake River Canyon, a fissure that deepens and widens impressively. I also put my toe to the line at Queen's Gate, without crossing into Canada. Why? We had not enough time to do the crossing properly, owing to the land auction. Instead, we turned back for Coeur d'Alene and Sand Point.

The land auction itself was nothing. Bids began at \$60,000, as I recall, but Chris was hoping for something lower, and so we headed back for Colorado. That night, perhaps 70 miles north of a famous truck stop called Something-America, I was driving through a snowstorm. The asphalt was wet all along the route, so it came as a sudden surprise to hit black ice as we came down the steep incline of a high hill. The Porsche skidded immediately, swerved, and then shot out of control across the right lane over into the left and the center rail. I managed to avoid hitting it, but in doing so the car veered to the right. We were now headed straight toward the guardrail on the opposite side, overlooking a drop of perhaps 100 feet. Well, we were going over, surely, and all I could say was "Shit." We hit hard, but the guardrail held, and then we began to carom, spinning from rail to rail. I counted five more hits before I got the car under control -- meaning, stopped nose-first against the guardrail. Shaken, we climbed out to push the car back onto the highway and to assess the damage. Amazingly, there was not a single dent or scratch, but there was an eighteen wheel tractor-trailer jackknifing it's way straight down upon us. We jumped back into the car and I skidded away as fast as I could, to avoid being clobbered by the deisel. When we got to Little America (that's the name), we ordered coffee and short stacks and listened to the radio. Everyone was talking, because several cars and trucks had gone over the guardrail and local units were being mobilized. Meanwhile, the storm had become hellish and state troopers were beginning to set roadblocks, north to south. So, we decided

to get moving, to stay ahead of the roadblocks, which eventually came all the way down to Fort Collins. We simply ran ahead of them, and, as I recall, for two days afterwards, highways remained closed.

So, there it is, my dying words. Not "Josephine!" or "I'll shift for myself" or "Either this wallpaper goes, or I do" -- just commonplace "shit".

Merde. One might have done better, but I am a wit-of-the-staircase type.

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Obama or McCain. Tomorrow is the day. Chomsky calls Obama the lesser of two evils, or other words to that effect. A few days back, I decided to cast a ballot for the first time in my life. I mentioned it to Richard Lair, and he said that he, also, had never voted. So we discussed the matter. In my case, I was not eligible to vote until the age of twenty-one, which means I was twenty-two during the 1972 election. By that time, I was turned off politics. Both Kennedys had been killed, King and Malcolm X had been killed, I was (always) fed up with Richard Nixon and Watergate was surfacing. After that, candidates from both parties looked ridiculous, especially Reagan. The Marlboro Man. I have never been able to stomach the Republican Party, as they are always selling trickle-down snake oil and fear, and they always do the opposite of their platform -- namely, run up deficits, expand bureaucracy, and take the military-industrial complex to free lunches. By contrast, Democratic candidates appeared ineffectual, out of focus, and far too poll-conscious.

I left for Thailand during the administration of CIA Bush, and I never trusted Clinton. Charm, as Graham Greene writes, is always something of a racket. As for Sonny-boy Bush, he was clearly Marlboro Man II, and Gore... well, since the stolen election, he seems to have changed a little. These days, he's well out of it.

So, now we come to this election. Who, in their right mind, would want the job? Who would want to be president? There are two wars in progress, the economy is a shambles, the country's infrastructure is crumbling, the national debt is at nightmare proportions, there has been a string of natural disasters with more coming thanks to changes in climate, and the population is split into two caricatures. Nevertheless, there stand Obama and McCain.

After arguing with myself at length, I decided to cast a vote for the first time in my life. I searched the Internet for the Chiang Mai US Consulate's web-site, to test the ropes around absentees. Too late, as it happened, because there was a deadline of 15 October. I had made the assumption that one might vote electronically at the Consulate during specified hours. Oh, well.

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I have not allowed myself to hope for anything since the Kennedy era went down by bullet. I've just listened to Obama make his address in Chicago. Well, it's been a long time coming. I hope against hope that he is the real deal. If not, then he sure fooled me. And he's right: the problems look nearly insurmountable, but this may be the time and the place. The opportunity.

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"Trickle Down (theory; economics)" -- adj., vi. in Reaganomics, a precursory term employed by advocates of unregulated markets before their full deregulation; made redundant by the Bush-era's "Suction Up" (vt).

Excerpt from:

Ambrose Bierce, *New Devil's Dictionary*; G.A. James, ed. (Pundit House, 2008).

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After writing the entry above, I decided to continue venting steam -- that is, I decided to expand the dictionary. But, my interest is already flagging. These additional entries are probably the lot:

**art** -- n. 1. cooking 2. business 3. sports 4. politics 5. warfare 6. *dada* (formerly *anti-art*). References: K. Humphrey, *The Art of Cooking*; D. Trump, *The Art of the Deal*; B. Glover, *The Art of Bowling*; R. Walker *The Art of Politics*; Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War*; T. Tzara, *The dada Manifesto*.

**bailout** -- 1. (n.) corporate welfare 2. a sacred tithe paid to Masters of the Universe (Wolfe, *Bonfire of the Vanities*) 3. (v.) a shift in burdensome debt from the new Olympians above to the working stiffs below.

**balance sheet** -- n. 1. the no-account beneficiary of tax revenues used to buy failing stock (formerly, a gilded paper certificate) in lending institutions, in lieu of purchasing the lender's toxic debt (e.g., over-priced houses), the object of which is to assist short sellers who could not in timely manner find a sucker; alternatively, a socialist attempt to preserve the purity of laissez-faire doctrine; also, the actualization of a free marketer's reading of John Maynard Keynes 2. "to boost a \_\_\_\_" v. (Great-Grandpa) *Throwin' good money after bad*.

**blacklist** (n., vi, vt) -- 1. n. a roll or catalog of a particular class (see: dissenters); an inventory of culprits; a form of reprisal within and without the Republican Party 2. vi. to name or identify another as being Un-American; to name or identify another as being Un-Republican 3. vt. "*Blacklist the sonofabitch.*" -- draft language from proposed Amendment to the US Constitution.

**candidate** (n.) -- anyone facing a teleprompter; especially: 1. a recipient of campaign financing 2. one who owes favors to financiers and industrialists 3. (Red State *colloq.*) someone with whom you'd like to have a beer and/or who thinks Africa is a country.

**capitalist** adj. 1. general term now reserved for free-market buccaneers 2. an ideologue who reduces all human motivation to the realization of profit 3. one who supposes markets can act as the sole arbiter between competing self-interests 4. a delusional who believes investments will protect him in Hobbes' state of nature.

**collateral damage** n. -- 1. the devaluation of borrowed assets in an investment portfolio 2. targets destroyed by neutron bombs (*cf.* euphemism).

**compromise** -- 1. (n.) a concession to solve a dispute; 2. the realignment of the better angels of one's nature in accordance with prevailing winds; 3. (v) to make an astute career move; 4. to seek a position between two extremes; thus to be neither fish nor foul: among peers, to act reasonably; among politicians, to be statesmanlike; among artists, martyrs, and



ideologues, to sell out; 5. to order a diet cola instead of iced tea to accompany pastrami on white bread.

**conservative** -- n. 1. one who does not conserve oceans, forests, or atmosphere.

**denial** n. -- 1. (*dialect*) river running from south to north in Africa 2. survival response when confronted with facts; hence, magical thinking 3. R. Limbaugh's explanation of the 2008 election

**dependency** n. 1. relationship of child to parent, consumer to producer, and capital to labor 2. relationship of tenant to landlord, painter to patron, and labor to capital.

**disappointment** -- (*colloq.* Wall Street) n. third-quarter returns (2007).

**disaster** -- (*colloq.* Wall Street) n. third-quarter returns (2008).

**dystopia** n. -- 1. any utopia after its implementation 2. Plato's *Republic*, Augustine's *City of God*, Dante's *Paradiso*, Butler's *Erewhon*, Marx's *Freedonia* 3. suburb of any megalopolis or the incorporated city proper 4. a zone for low-income housing.

**empire** -- n. 1. end result of a system of garrisons established and maintained by the ancient Romans Cf. 165 (?) US military bases girding the globe.

**eon (aeon)** -- n. an age of the universe; immeasurable eternity; otherwise a period of four years, in case of a single term Republican presidency. Grk: aions aions (*pl.* "two terms")

**euphemism** n. -- 1. the substitution of a vague phrase for an ambiguous term; hence, a clear attempt to obfuscate 2. military-industrial parlance.

**experience** -- n. 1. the end of idealism 2. that which precedes experimentation. (*See* experiment.)

**experiment** -- n. 1. controlled attempt to reproduce, in reverse order, the arbitrary chain of effect (noticed first) and cause (sought afterwards) 2. objective search for a desired result.

**golden handshake** n. -- (bus. admin.) a gratuity for malfeasance committed while wearing a tailored suit (ed. RL).

**golden parachute** n. -- 1. (*transport.*) a first-class conveyance to the Caribbean Islands 2. (*bus. admin.*) a multi-million dollar severance package awarded to or arranged by CEOs and CFOs irrespective of performance; among shareholders of junior position, contractual dacoity.

**greed** n. in capitalist virtue ethics, the cardinal trait.

**human resources** n. -- *see* "collateral damage" (2).

**insider trading** -- n. 1) conversation on a golf course or after dinner at a country club.

**language** n. -- 1. (*obsolete*) a vehicle of communication (*see* unknown unknowns) 2. large pool of lexical elements, 1,000 of which have equal value to a picture by Thomas Kinkade.

**leisure** -- n. 1. birthright of nobility and investment bankers (*cf.* *Isles of the Caribees*) 2. in ancient Greece, time allotted to mental improvement and physical development 3. (US) watching television.

**legitimacy** -- n. (natural dynastic law) in France, the right to rule that directly descends from the Merovingians, a line of priest-kings beginning with issue of the Princess Melusine and a sea monster. (*Cf.* anc. Messo. offspring of Lillith and Samael.)

**liberality** -- n. an aberration of human nature in the main, which generally consists in being fearful, spiteful, intolerant, and greedy.

**margin call** n. -- 1. reality check 2. piper-paying time 3. a crack in the foundation of a house of cards 4. massive taurine flatulence (*see* bull fart).

**market** n. -- 1. organized system of belief based upon misapprehension, patent absurdity, computerized miscalculation, false projection, expert opinion, magical thinking, and greed 2. financial district where shells will soon be traded for beads.

***nolo contendere*** -- (U.S. law; Latin) the sworn statement of a Republican Vice-President; *cf.* Spiro T. Agnew's farewell address; 2. expected initial pleading in Senate hearings re constitutional violations and oaths of office (*see* Cheney, Dick).

**optimism** n. -- 1. in abnormal psychology, the unshakable conviction that this world is minimally salubrious 2. adj. optimistic: a trait arising from a sequential mutation of the human genome. *Cf.* Francis Bacon (English painter): "I'm just optimistic, that's all. I'm optimistic about nothing. I was born optimistic."

**orthodoxy** n. (*hist.*) correct belief backed by an army (*see* politics; religion).

**paradigm** -- n. 1. pattern or worldview 2. cost of a cup of coffee in the next Depression: e.g., "*Brother, can youse par-a-digm?*"

**pardon** -- n., vt. for campaign contributors, arms dealers, and white collar criminals, a thank-you note from an out-going President of the United States.

**pessimism** n. -- modish melancholia that stops short of nihilism, the symptoms of which are generally treatable by ingestion of single malts 2. (*trad.*) anxiety that this world is precisely as optimists envision it 3. properly, the right relation to reality. *Ant.* optimism

**politics** n. 1. science of getting what you want 2. a transformational process by which the worst instincts of ideologues become platforms of parties.

**realpolitik** n. -- without reference to ethics or ideals, the clear-eyed, disillusioned pursuit of real material needs until dire straits force a reconsideration of reciprocity.

**recession** -- n. legacy of the Administration of George W. Bush.

**reciprocity** -- n. 1. humanist restatement of the Golden Rule, considered by some to be the basis of a simplistic herd morality 2. a logical fallacy outside mainstream Neo-Con theory 3. fairness; the last refuge of a Nietzschean superman facing the existential choice between bankruptcy and bailout (see "bailout"; cf. Lehman Bros).

**relationship** -- n. that which sails past and over the edge of the world.

**religion** n. -- 1. one of several organized communities of belief based upon inattention to variant or corrupted texts, strained or politicized interpretations, and mutual antagonisms.

**repression** -- n. (*psych.*) mechanism that drives Freudian psychoanalytic theory; namely, a censor within the mind that is aware of those thoughts and feelings about which the mind would rather be unaware 2. a Zen koan 3. among acolytes of William Kristol, the standard of mental health.

**Scandinavian model** (*econ.*) 1. a modified form of democratic socialism which produced the world's highest standard of living (healthcare, education, housing), scrapped in favor of lower taxes and higher balances in personal checking accounts 2. the system that preceded current levels of bankruptcy, unemployment and homelessness in Iceland, Sweden and Norway. Cf. Reagan-Thatcher ascendancy

**socialist** -- n., adj, anyone who does not hail from Beaumont, Texas; alternatively, one who places the commonweal above profiteering. Item: "I think he is a socialist," said Marilyn Martindale. The talk was of a change for the worse under Obama... "I am afraid our way of life is about to change drastically," said Sue Harris, as Fox News blared... (*The Guardian*, 10 November 2008).

**stimulus package** -- n. 1) for Baby Boomers, a ten-tablet panel of Viagra 2. an attempt to jump-start the US economy before the 2008 election 3. *if not to be used to pay off debt*, a placebo for treating symptoms rather than the underlying disease.

**stoicism** n. -- The doctrine that one should suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, rather than talk to the skull of a buffoon. Traditional subscribers to this view tend not to find amusement in cemeteries. Neo-stoicism, by contrast, relies on humor to maintain a semblance of mental equilibrium. Cf. *Int'l Test of Neo-Stoicism* (headstone in New England): "Here lies John Bun / Who was killed by a gun / His name was not Bun but Wood / But Wood would not rhyme with gun / and Bun would"

**Super Bowl** -- a world championship in which American football teams, undefeated since 1965, have compiled the longest winning streak in the history of international sports.

**theory** -- n. 1. a stand-in for knowledge, of which there are three types: a) accepted opinion (*cf.* orthodoxy); b) crackpot rants (*see* Kennedy assassination; blog/web-log topics); c) single bullet demonstrations (*see* magic; Warren Report) -- *syn.* cover-up. 2. hypothesis derived from systematically analyzed data in accordance with strict adherence to the principle of verification (the reliability of which cannot be determined).

**unknown unknowns, the** -- in Zen rhetoric and the poetics of Donald Rumsfeld, that which exists in contradistinction to *known knowns* 2. anything that cannot be described, located or predicted with any precision. See: known unknowns; *cf.* unknown knowns.

**utopia** n. -- 1. Agartha 2. Arcadia 3. Shangri-la 4. the seven cities of Cibola 4. Beaumont, Texas (*see* dystopia).

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This entry is anachronistic, because it is being written the day following the last entry, immediately below, when I felt there was nothing more -- or perhaps, too much more -- to add to this daybook, or memoir, or whatever it is. Why, because of pentimenti that arise when painters change their minds or second-guess themselves. In this case, for example, there is a number of friends who have been indispensable to me and of whom I have not made a single sketch. I cannot explain why that should be, while I realize that it must be true for everyone who tries to set down -- that is, to reduce to a few pages... well, words fail and let's avoid the ramble. I think you know what I mean. Also, there are many events that must go unrecorded for one reason or another, although they may be important to the writer who leaves them out. In my case, there are adventures in the Colorado high country, in the company of James Disney back in the 1970s and 1980s, which, considering the immediacy of their recollection, might have happened last week. But I know that Jim keeps a journal, and I suspect that he will mention our treks. Still, there is one story that he cannot tell, even though he was in the vicinity at the time. Perhaps this story may stand in for every other story that I have chosen not to tell.

It was the summer of 1982, and five of us were camped at the confluence of East Moody Canyon and the Escalante River. I stayed behind in camp on the third day, while the others waded downstream. Late in the morning, I decided to double back into East Moody, to have another look at the meandering, narrow canyon we had come down.

East Moody is indeed narrow and meandering. In places, it is like being in a box with a blue lid, and the silence is palpable. I remember the condensation trail of a jet streaking high overhead, so some sound must have announced it. If so, it was faint, and, after the jet passed, I was alone. I do not wear a watch, so perhaps I walked for an hour or an hour and a half before I thought something was in my ears. I stopped. It was then when I realized that the only sound had been my footfall. Otherwise, there was nothing -- not a waft of wind, not a bird, not lizard, not a falling stone, not even the sound of two atoms touching in the air. What I could hear, for the first time in my life, was the blood coursing through my ears. And a heartbeat.

I continued on for some time, until it occurred to me that the sun might set earlier in a narrow canyon than upon a wide plain or a high mountain, and so I turned around. On the way back to our camp, within fifteen or twenty yards of where I turned around, I saw that, inside my earlier tracks, there were the footprints of a mountain lion. I knew which mountain lion it was, too, because we had seen it on the opposite bank of the Escalante, when we pitched our tents.

I froze. Then I looked around for something like a cudgel among the dried limbs between the boulders, where I found a serviceable length of fairly hard wood approximately the size of a Hank Aaron autographed baseball bat. Then I headed gingerly back to camp, walking slowly and listening intently, and keeping an eye to overhead rocks. And that's how I made my way. I never again saw the mountain lion, but I knew it most certainly could see me.

I think I have chosen to tell about this because it illustrates an aspect of my life up to now. As E.M. Forster somewhere writes, I seem to pass through life without ever colliding with it -- so when someone marries or dies, I am always in the next room. Not by design, so far as I can tell -- it just works out that way. One more thing: in saying this, I may have prompted fate.

As I get older, I feel more and more like a stranger. I find our world to be less and less like home. I am not speaking of the planet itself, but the human world -- the world we have made for ourselves.

See *New Devil's Dictionary*: pessimism. Let's leave it at that.

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15 November 2008 -- I think I have given enough time and effort to this manuscript. I have been making the occasional scribble for six years on, and, although I had hoped to reach one hundred pages, I can no longer see the point. This is so, even though there are friends I have failed to mention and a few more stories to tell. The problem is, as I said somewhere above, I really am not a diarist. Beyond that, it's November, and the days are getting shorter. I should use the daylight to work on something else. Still, before we part, there is one more term in need of obfuscation:

**gentleman** -- 1. adj. of the old school 2. n. one who possesses refined manners; one of genteel deportment 3. alternatively, a commonplace dude with pretensions to discretion; e.g., an autobiographer who refrains from relating tales of great loves, romantic trysts, casual conquests, prescription medications, narrow escapes, duels, and banishment 4. (*ahem*) moi. *Syn.* tedious company; bore; *cf.* liar.

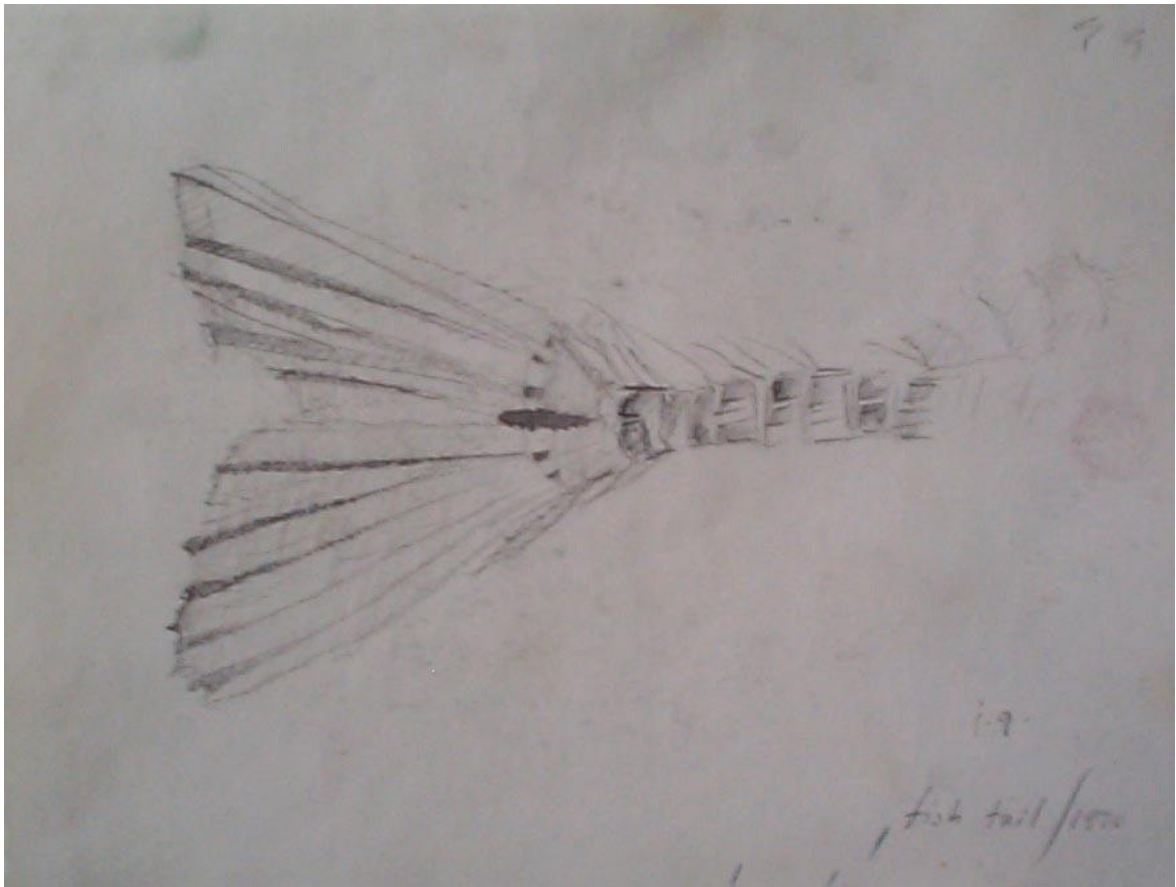
That's that, then. Last weekend, Aaron returned to the States and Janjira returned on Thursday night from a conference in Bangkok. For a while this week, I was missing both of them.

Beautiful light, today. Have started painting again.

This afternoon in Krungthep, they will cremate the king's sister. Meanwhile, the coucal so often outside my window must be off somewhere. I guess that's my life in a nutshell.

*fin* คือ พอแล้ว

# NIGHTBOOK



another journal of some kind

I cannot find my way out of the *Daybook*, so I have decided to begin again. This is the *Nightbook*.

That's a new opening. It replaces the old opening, written maybe eight years ago. How do I know it was eight years ago? Because the old opening was followed by this paragraph:

"This morning I made a zip file of the daybook and sent it to my mother, to Aaron, and to two or three old friends, including my patient patron in Colorado. Then, I read through what I had written between late 2001 (or early 2002) and this year, 2008. By noon, I had read half the manuscript before putting it aside. Probably I will not read the rest. I thought to rewrite certain passages – if not all of it – but perhaps it is best to leave it alone. It is what it is."

Yes, it is what it is, and time goes by. Today is Saturday, 28 February 2015. The paragraphs which follow were written beginning in 2008. From that year to this, I have written only twenty-five or thirty pages in this journal. Last month, with a new year, I returned to making entries. I'm not sure why. Anyway, we will make an approach to the "present" (about thirty pages away, don't forget), beginning here, in 2008:

One or two things caught my attention immediately. Of course, the writing [in *Daybook*] is all over the board. I knew that from the get-go and did not care, but still... it is difficult to read and out of focus. At the same time, one or two apparent obsessions present themselves, by which I mean to say that I may have learned something about myself through writing, although I think a distortion comes into play.

One obsession is the passage of time. More than thrice I wrote 'the days are growing short' or some other similarly apocalyptic phrase. In part, it is a mannerism I have acquired. However, it is also a gut feeling I have had for as long as I can remember. My experiences have done little to dissuade me, even though I know that throughout history many Jeremiahs and Cassandras have pointed to the end of the world. Somehow, I can't seem to shake it.

I think it is vanity of a kind. For me, there are two contexts: my bones are creaking more and more, and the human world is winding down. "The world we have made for ourselves" is the way I tend to put it. Of the two contexts, the more important is listed first. Now that's vain. Anyway, depending upon the subject at hand in this nightbook, I will mean one context or the other, sometimes both at once, where and whenever the phrase pops up. Yet, I promise to make an effort to avoid such phrases – that is, to make an end of the end of the world.

Another obsession is politics, when ordinarily I am not at all political. It has been, I believe, a consequence of the Bush years and an aggressive, all or nothing neo-con paradigm that makes nearly every aspect of daily life become polarized. Nor do I think that neo-liberals are any better. I once dreamed of a unified world, but globalization is a

corporate nightmare, and I think of free marketers as freebooters. Even with the upcoming change in administration, I do not think the politicization of daily life will lessen.

Meanwhile, here in Thailand, it has been the era of Thaksin, which, although he is currently in exile, is still not played out. My gut feeling is that Thailand will pave hell before it passes. So, in my skewed world, whether one likes it or not, is willing or not, one must confront politics and the mass media that promulgate it. Too bad, because I would rather plant trees and prune roses. As Richard Lair recently put it, "A curse on both their houses." Amen, and thanks to the bard of Avon for nailing it.

The distortion I see in the daybook arises in part from the irregularity with which entries were made. At one point, I went a year or more without writing a word. Also, I tended to write when I was irritated or felt entirely out to sea. Hence the manuscript is imbued with a concentrated angst. Reading it now, I would say, charitably, that the writer belongs in a loony bin. I can no longer follow some of the asides and parenthetical remarks, although they seemed clear enough when I wrote them. And I had to wince at the many mistakes in the daybook. For an old trumpeter to go on about 'embrachure' instead of embouchure is priceless. Oh well. I guess my English is deteriorating along with my memory. So much for the daybook, which reflects one time and one place. This, then, is the nightbook, as we begin again. Who knows? Maybe this time it will come out right.

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It's Thanksgiving in Colorado, although the day must be nearly past by now. I spoke by telephone to Glen, Suzanne, Aaron, and Mom. Darlene is staying overnight with Mom, and Debra is coming again on the weekend. Me? I am staying in Lampang, after all.

When I received news on Tuesday morning that Bob's kidneys had failed, I went to Immigration in Chiang Mai for a return visa. Then I began searching for airlines on the Internet. Then, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) moved on Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang airports in Bangkok. All flights are cancelled indefinitely. Many people are stranded.

My intention from the beginning has been to fly out of Chiang Mai. The choice of carriers was between Silk Air (Singapore) and China Air. Seats are/were available beginning December 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup>, I cannot remember now. The prices are more than I can afford now -- just to get to San Francisco, much less Colorado -- but sometimes one must bite the bullet.

Apparently, Bob's liver has also stopped functioning. Glen says that Bob has been taken off life support systems, and he will likely die by tomorrow. Mom says Bob could linger for days.

I went to the travel agent to cancel a reservation for next week, and, as I came through the door, the agent picked up papers on her desk and handed them to me, saying: "You do not want to go anywhere at this time. It's too crazy." I sat down, and we talked a few minutes. Then I went about the various stops that needed to be made on various little errands. Then I came home. Now I am writing.



I do not feel anything. Why, why, why... I do not know. Maybe it is because, when I saw Bob in 2004, I had a feeling that it was for the last time. I told him that I loved him, and that he's my dad.

Now I feel it. There's a hole. Something tells me that he's gone now, as I type.

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I called Bob's room and a nurse there held the telephone to his ear. I could hear Bob breathing as I spoke with him.

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Bob died around 2 AM Friday morning, the day after Thanksgiving. I think this would have been three or four hours after I called him. Three, maybe. In the evening, Janjira and I went out for dinner, and we raised glasses to his memory.

On the return home, I realized something rather unusual had happened when I called Bob. The telephone line was crystal clear, even though my call was routed through two switchboards at the hospital. Ordinarily, calls to anywhere, including right here in Lampang, have walls of white noise interference. Often, it is very difficult to hear clearly, as happened when I called Mom after dinner. There was white noise and the usual echoes. By contrast, I may as well have been sitting beside Bob while the nurse held the receiver to his ear. The sound was crystal clear. Odd that I did not realize it in the moment, but I was fortunate to be able to speak at all. Now, it's Saturday morning here in Lampang. The sun has come over the hill and, out the window, I see that Janjira's rose bushes are blooming. I'm all right, I guess. Just tired and all cried out.

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Have started painting the inside of the house, to keep busy. Can't concentrate enough to paint anything else. Up and down a lot lately, one moment I am fine, the next not.

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8 December 2008, Monday

This afternoon is Bob's funeral, although by Colorado time it will be around 5 AM tomorrow morning here in Lampang. Meanwhile, one of Janjira's relatives died over the weekend, and this morning I had blood in my stool. That's the phrase, isn't it.

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ITEM. Sven Bocklandt, a geneticist at the David Geffen school of medicine at UCLA, is bewildered by the argument that people choose their sexual attraction. He said that virtually every animal species that has been studied - from sheep to fruit flies - has a small minority of individuals who demonstrate homosexual activity.

"I really believe the reason most humans are straight is the same reason that most crocodiles are straight, and the same reason most whales are straight," Bocklandt said. "Nature would not leave something so important for reproduction, for the survival of the species, to coincidence."

What is this, the teleology of Nature? Nothing left to coincidence or chance. I wonder whether Bocklandt meant to say that. Language strikes again, apparently.

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This is the sort of coincidence that drives me crazy. I awoke about 40 minutes ago in one of those half-dream states, thinking that the Shroud of Turin could not be an image of Jacques de Molay any more than an image of Jesus of Nazareth. Why? In Jacques' case, he was roasted over a fire, so his hair and beard would have burnt off -- and also because, as he was roasted slowly, the fully cooked meat would likely have fallen off his bones. In Jesus' case, the angles of bloodstains are wrong, because he was nailed to a *crux simplex* not a Latin cross. So I dismiss the thought, pour coffee and open the NYT webpage that Richard Lair forwarded to me. It is about an exhibition at the Städel Museum in Frankfurt, the Master of Flémalle and Rogier van der Weyden in an old-fashioned whodunit. There are three paintings, including Flémalle's "Veil of Veronica". Aargh. I have always liked Van der Weyden. He's a favorite.

Meanwhile, Lair has loaned me the Criterion Collection's edition of "Jules & Jim". I sent him this e-mail: The chapter "Elective Affinities" is where Jim and Catherine kiss for the first time. Behind them is a window, and directly down the window (on Jim's side) comes a long insect that makes a 90-degree turn and walks straight to Catherine's side. As she raises her face to kiss Jim, the two trajectories converge, and the insect goes right into Catherine's mouth a split second before Jim kisses her. That is, Jim's kiss comes right on the heels of the insect. It is so striking that I replayed the scene two more times, each time with a different commentary (there are 5 tracks, with 2 in English). Not one critic or colleague (including Annette Insdorf) said a single word about the insect. I could not believe it. The conjunction of mouth and bug is exceptionally striking -- eerie, I want to say -- and for me changes the whole complexion of the film. I have trouble believing that Truffaut did not see it when editing, or that it is purely coincidence. The insect is out of focus, and it could be animation.

Lair wrote: I would like to see it [again]. I could probably tell if it was animation (I know something about the state of the art when the film was made). Is the film any good?

Is the film any good? I am not sure how to answer. It's definitely dated -- for example, *vis-à-vis* cremation. Few today would recall that there was once any controversy about it, and the film's last line about the scattering of ashes being 'against regulations' sounds unimaginatively flippant more than laconic. The *ménage à trois* does not work (the real

story in the supplements is far more interesting), and the pseudo-literary quotations and allusions that are the scripted support for the J-J friendship sound pretentious and strained. They remind me of an article that cites two or three sources, yet has a list of references of dozens of related books that the author has not read. For me, what throws all this out the window, in an instant, is the insect that does a right turn to enter Moreau's mouth just as Jim kisses Catherine. It's amazing, and it carries all the way to the end of the film -- the remaining ten minutes or so.

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(BangkokPost.com) - Newly-elected Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva sent short messages via service operators, introducing himself and vowing to lead the country out of crises. "I am the new prime minister, and I would like to lead Thailand out of crises. If you are interested, please contact me by sending your postal code back to this number," said the message.

Voila -- an electronic list of those who wish to solve the problems of the country is generated. Are those names considered friends of the state? I think I have seen the future.

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8 January 2009 -- to R.L.

Thanks for sending NO COUNTRY my way. McCarthy has the dialog down pat. My great-grandfather Olinger and my granduncles, to a man, spoke in the rhythms of McCarthy's sheriff. The voice is memorable. I read the first 20 pages and the last 20 pages, as well as italicized monologues in the middle -- all of it solid, effective writing of the post-Hemingway School. I appreciate sentences like this: He watched the little brindled desert doves come stooping in under the dull rose light. Still, it is not my sort of book, however compelling the sheriff's voice. Next up, the Coen Bros...

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Yesterday was one of those days in which I had no patience for those around me, nor was I able to get my thoughts collected enough to write. So, of course, this morning I awoke thinking about the generally accepted age of the universe, the estimated number of stars in our galaxy, the size of the national debt and the numbers batted about in the global bailout of the financial sector -- all by way of comparison. Two thoughts occur to me: first, given global warming, I hope we have enough time to print all that money; second, a chemical marriage has obtained between alchemy and mathematics. Meanwhile, I'm still trying to understand why  $0 \times 0 = 0$  at the same time  $0$  to the  $0$ -power  $= 1$  -- never mind the square root of minus one. But, as even numbers are irrational, so perhaps rationality is overrated.

Me? I'm with Hamlet. Thinking makes it so. Lately I have been wondering why so many of my fellows think of experts as having expertise. It is the smartest guys in the room who have provided the means for total annihilation, pollution, global warming, mega-cities, financial meltdown, and on and on, as technology of one kind or another runs away from us. We really have made a mess of it, all of us. I still hear people say that, as humans have created the problems, humans can solve the problems. Now, there's an article of faith.

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"Face it, we are toast." That's Richard Lair speaking, as he pours a tall single malt and water. Perhaps it's time to write a sketch of him, although I suspect he would prefer a proper biography. Well, if anyone of my acquaintance is astute as Boswell, it is likely to be Richard. But he is also something of a Johnson (though at this date a doctorate would have to be honoris causa), so that suggests an autobiography. But being like Johnson means that Richard is usually on the fly and perhaps too busy to write about himself. All that's on one side. From another angle, Richard was for years an editor (for example, of Krisher's biography of Prince Sihanouk), an experience that can be disabling, although he did write *Gone Astray*, a hornbook dealing with the Asian elephant in captivity. Also, he is responsible for translating Nikom Rayawa's *High Banks, Heavy Logs* from Thai to English. Still, an autobiography is another matter. Would he do it? Could he do it? Whatever is the case, this unauthorized sketch is still in need of a place to start.

To begin, I will say that Richard Lair is remarkable in many ways. He is also a difficult subject and a walking contradiction. He is a product of public schools and an autodidact, a private person with an extensive network of friends and acquaintances, an atheist with a shrine to Ganesha, a civil tongue that does not suffer fools, a quick wit when swiping lines from Parker, Mencken or Wilde, a connoisseur of sheep jokes, limericks and Delta blues, a student of naval history during the Napoleonic Wars, a reader of pulp fiction, a collector of samurai films, a devotee of natural science, a pothead, a consumer of current affairs, a filmic CIA operative during the evacuation of the US Embassy in Phenom Phen... and so on. At this point, one could easily stop and say 'so much for first impressions'. To know Richard Lair better is to discover his breadth and depth.

He is a born raconteur and exactly factual; although, like Puck's other mortals, he is from time to time mistaken, yet, by force of habitual competitiveness, he invariably ignores it. This is no surprise, because he comes from a middling sized family fathered by a one-armed football coach of Scottish extraction and a mother who is Basque. At this writing, both parents are alive and in their nineties.

Richard grew up in Lompoc, although he usually claims to be from San Francisco. More than once, I have heard him say, only half in jest, "I'm not an American, I'm from San Francisco." By that remark he means 'cosmopolitan' in the sense of Alfred Hitchcock's view of the Bay Area as an American Riviera. Lompoc, by contrast, was a rural town near Vandenberg (formerly Cooke) Airbase where Elizabeth Short, victim in the Black Dahlia Murder, went to stay for a time with her father. Otherwise, it was cheap transportation into the city that supports his claim; that, and attending SF State, where he studied medicine, art, and filmmaking. The last one stuck. Before coming to Thailand, Richard Lair was a filmmaker. That was then. These days, he is more likely to be a technical advisor to Disney Studios or Oliver Stone whenever a movie makes use of elephants.

An old photograph shows Richard as a kid jostling among rambunctious siblings and cousins, ready for all comers. The photo was taken before his left leg was wasted with polio. That wasting disease is the determining factor in his life, because it was during the convalescence from polio that Richard became the person he is today. Above all, because of the many hours spent alone while others were outside playing, he learned to entertain himself and to go it alone. Let me explain what I mean by the latter trait. I repeat: Richard's father was a football star who was missing an arm. Later, he became a football coach. That's unusual. Although Richard has never said it, I suspect that his father's sympathy went something like this: "Minus a good leg? Yeah, that's tough, so get crackin'."

So now it's dinner with his cousin BJ, who has come to visit... seven hours of sitting around the unwieldy teak dining table, which is topped with plate glass over a deeply recessed bas relief depicting elephants in their native habitat. There's Northern Thai and Northeastern food and lots of scotch, some single malts, as Richard is also curator of the Whiskey Museum, a well-stocked cabinet in Noi's kitchen. Meanwhile, Noi is not to be found, for she has climbed the stairs in favor of television, to escape the ruckus at ground level. The ruckus started with a disputation about field recordings of Hawaiian music. It's about whose recordings are older and purer. It's about who appreciated such and such an ensemble or singer, first. It's who introduced what to whom, when. And so forth. An hour passes, the subject changes to etymologies, and it, too, leads to disputation.

Another hour passes before there is disagreement over a recent poll. Richard rises from the table, to go outside for a smoke. BJ leans over, smiles, and confides to me, "Nothing has changed. It was like this when we were kids."

I liked BJ. She and Richard were still fencing when I when I departed at 2:30. I had arrived at 7:30, and I do not remember saying more than half a dozen brief remarks, inserted edgewise. It was a memorable evening.

We have known each other five or six years now. We seldom meet for lunch these days, mostly because Richard's schedule is too disruptive of my day. For him, lunch falls between 13.30 and 15.00 hours, and ends between 16.00 and 16.30. Then he takes a nap until evening, rises, drinks coffee and begins a new day that lasts until two or three in the morning. Formerly, dinner was around midnight. These days, I am unsure whether he eats dinner at all, because now he is subject to acid reflux. In public, this condition has to be an embarrassment in addition to a painful imposition. Because we meet less and less, we communicate more and more by e-mail. For example, he sent this link and a note:

<http://www.portfolio.com/culture-lifestyle/2009/03/30/Phillips-de-Pury-Struggles>

I am willing to manage you if you consent to plastic surgery and a sex change. R

I wrote: Hello, Dali. Sort of Demanda Lair, after Amanda Lear?

Richard Lair wrote: I was thinking more of Lolita Linda Lear. It rolls so nicely over the tongue.

Here's another exchange:

I wrote: Learned the results of x-rays and RMI yesterday. At L-4 and L-5, there is narrowing of the channel through which the nerve passes. Also, L-5 has a bone spur pressing the nerve. On the other hand, there is good news about S 1-3, which I was told

(last year) is deteriorating. Apparently, it is not in such bad shape, for someone my age. Anyway, the doctor is talking about laminectomy -- but maybe not yet. So I think it is time to begin research into new techniques, then see what it is available at Sirirat Hospital.

Richard Lair wrote: I hope it works out. I have thought of getting an MRI but why? A simple Xray shows my spine is grotesquely misshapen, BUT I have very little sharp pain. A strong twinge every now and then. (Though about four years ago I had several weeks of intense pain.) Spasms, both frozen and instantaneous. Tics. Often a feeling that a giant fist is squeezing my lower spine. Still, if there is no strong pain, why operate? In which case, why do an MRI? Hmmm. Best to have another drink.

I wrote: Gee... I thought our communications were private, ya know? But here I see four or five advertisements for back pain clinics, surgical techniques, and doctors on the right side of this e-mail. What would happen, d'ya thunk, if we began discussing the purchase of assault weapons?

Richard Lair wrote: I often wonder how much of our (meaning like minded souls) communications are monitored and by whom. If you write, "That movie was really a bomb", does that get picked up somewhere? Last night I watched a film with incredible levels of sex and violence that I would like you to see.

I wrote: Honestly, incredible levels of sex and violence do not sound especially compelling. Have you noticed Eagle Pennell's *The Whole Shooting Match*, listed at vanvdo? Watched it last night. It's one of the earliest indie films and influenced Redford to start Sundance.

Richard Lair wrote: Sex and violence. Well, I have been watching 'The Blue Planet', an incredible BBC series about the oceans. (Lots of sex and violence in the oceans, it seems.) The second shot in the first episode is incredibly beautiful. Anyway, I guess I was getting burnt out on 'people films' and so it looks like for a while I am stuck in nature films. Amazing what they are able to capture nowadays. It will all be perfectly documented when we go extinct. I had noticed *The Whole Shooting Match*. Almost put it on my want list. Is it any good?

I wrote: I think it's good, but a one-time only for viewing. It's main virtue is verisimilitude. It's a Texan (Pennell) showing a slice of life in Texas, not some moviemaker from Hollywood filming 'Hud'. My grand-uncles were real cowboys in Texas and Colorado, and the gentlemen in the film are next-generation versions of my uncles. It's the real stuff, with trucks instead of horses. I will lend you my copy if you are interested.

Richard Lair wrote: I'll put it on my reserve backup list, because I like films that conjure a time and place. Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God? -- Epicurus, philosopher (c. 341-270 BCE)

I wrote: Epicurus is on the outside, looking in. The real question is from the inside: If God has foreknowledge and is benevolent, then why did he not consider the ramifications of creating, directly or indirectly, a to-be-fallen angel -- the very one

that took one-third of the stars of heaven with him? It is this angel's rebellion that led to desolation of the planet and the annihilation of 6,000,000 Jews, 2,000,000 Armenians, cancer of the cervix, chickens born with two heads, etc. The so-called fallen state.

Richard Lair wrote: Thank God I am not a Christian! Much better off with the Asian Mumbo Jumbo.

We go on and on like this. So much for e-pistles between two old farts in a foreign land. Say good night, Richard. ("Goodnight, Richard.")

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Lately I have been reading Vacandard's *The Inquisition: A Critical and Historical Study of the Coercive Power of the Church*. On first impression, it is a case study -- but it becomes increasingly rationalized and apologetic as the persecutions expand.

The change is incremental, and it takes three-to-four hundred years, as early prohibitions against persecution and torture are gradually chipped away -- first, by teasing words from the scriptural context and arguing their meaning; then, by relying upon those theological arguments while working out a synthesis with ancient Roman law; then, by applying the synthesis by marrying it with the objectives of princes who were blessed in performing the church's dirty work. In the end, the church's policy moved 180 degrees from its original position. Everyone's hands were bloodied, although the apologist pretends otherwise, because there must be an air of legitimacy, and the church must appear blameless. I do not think the apologist is unique in performing this little tap dance. Rather, it's basic human nature. The entire process is instructive. Before the church can eliminate dissenters or non-believers, and confiscate their property, it must explain itself to itself. Working backwards, this is accomplished by constructing new arguments based upon different premises obtained by tinkering with the meaning of words. The change, of course, is entirely rational. It's also delusional.

In Anno Domini 2009 (C.E., really), many people would be surprised to learn that the office of the Holy Inquisition still conducts business, gathering information into files. Now, why would they be doing that? To answer my own question, I think the Inquisition would still be conducting business fully in accordance with its mandate and purview were it not for the rise of secularized nation states. Even today, there would be little difference between the activities of this office and those of an Islamist state.

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11 February 2009 -- This headline should be filed under Death of English Grammar, The:

[Prostate cancer urine test hope](#)

This is a sequence of five nouns, with four used as adjectives (i.e., modern adverbs).

Meanwhile, here is another headline:

### Sulak urges lese majeste law change

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva should seek royal advice on changing the lèse-majesté law following the slew of cases in recent months, says social critic Sulak Sivaraksa.

This file could not be found. Gee, I wonder who removed it... Beyond that, does it take too much ink to write 'Sulak urges change in lese majeste law'? Apparently, yes -- even with electronic texts.

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[File under: Can't Give Them Away]

Nadine -- If you decide not to keep the portrait of Jay, don't be shy about returning it. After all, you said yes to it, sight unseen. I have always kept it turned to the wall, so I will understand if you cannot live with it. Try it on for as long as you like, to see how it wears. It's yours, if you can live with it. Best to you, JG

Dear James, Thank you for your e-mail. Sadly, we have made the decision to give the portrait back to you. I gave it to Parn this morning to bring to her house. It is a beautiful painting and wonderful picture of Jay, but it was really disturbing to La. He didn't feel comfortable putting it in the house and had trouble looking at it. I also felt deeply affected by it, but not to the same degree. Thank you so very much for the offer. We will just keep his memory alive in our hearts and minds, as he has always been. Take Care, Nadine

Thanks for trying it out. It's not surprising, La's reaction. Janjira has the same problem. There is a real difference in perception between East and West in these matters. I am slowly, slowly coming to understand it. Another example is a painting I made of a Chinese cemetery -- more or less in the spirit of Jakob van Ruisdael (spelling is surely wrong here, but I cannot recall it rightly) and his famous painting of a Jewish Cemetery. Anyway, this is why I have declined to exhibit work here [in Lampang]. I am not interested in troubling an audience, while at the same time I cannot paint anything but what I paint. The dilemma is boring, really, after all these years. Best regards and thanks for writing...

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28 February 2009 / Saw this headline. An entire generation has come of age during the run, and I've not seen a single episode:

**Animated comedy The Simpsons is to become the longest-running prime-time series in US TV history after makers Fox ordered another two seasons.**

The show is currently in its 20th season which matches the record of Western drama Gunsmoke, shown on CBS, which ended in 1975.



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9 March 2009

This morning, and again this evening, I have been rehearsing what I might have said at another time, in another place, if only I had found the words or understood my thoughts better. Rehearsing what one might have said must be a function of aging. It's reverie of a kind, and it is also the revision (hence, denial) of personal history. It's playacting. And for a moment, strangely, it's playacting that assumes a semblance of truth, insofar as it permits one to do or say rather better than one managed to say or do in fact. So today I have been rehearsing what elsewhere has been written or said many times to others. It is another take on a personal scenario. A restatement, perhaps more accurate, that has been triggered by a book.

*Possession*, by A.S. Byatt, which romance I am reading for the first time, describes academics spending their lives absorbed with (and by) the lives and works of others, and that absorption exacts a price. In coming to understand the movement of Ash's mind, say, they have no room for the movement(s) of their own minds -- no thoughts of their own. This notion does not originate with A.S. Byatt, but she describes the phenomenon rather well. Moreover, what Byatt describes is in point with whatever I was 'thinking' in 1982, when I stopped reading the art press because I could not hear myself think. For years I have said it that way. "I wanted to hear myself think." However, it was sensed, intuitive, something I could not then have expressed in Byatt's clear terms, at all. Without any clear formulation, I was afraid I might end up drowning in the currents everyone was swimming in. I felt it was necessary to stop sorting the multifarious trends and tendencies of the day, the conflicting explanations of competing theories, for the simple reason that the time required to sort everything left no time for me to do what I had set myself to do at nineteen.

Here's the irony: Even given this realization, along the way I discovered that, in fact, I have no ideas of my own. Moreover, I have failed to do what I set out to do, and that has been to make one good painting before I put down my brushes. How appalling is that? Some days, rehearsals are a bitch, but there's a joke in this, somewhere.

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Most days, because this is the hot season, water does not flow to our house. When it does, there is little pressure, and in minutes it cuts off. This morning water was running when I rose to make coffee, so I thought I should take care of the grass, plants, and trees around our little house, even though the sun had not yet risen. I went outside, took a whiz, then sprinkled or carried the watering can all 'round. It took perhaps 30-40 minutes, what with waiting for the can to fill each time. The colors of flowers and leaves were muted, the sky appeared pale with the approaching sunrise, and there was a high, yellow three-quarter moon, unusually clear and bright. It was good to see, after so many windless days of dense smoke from slash-and-burn. With the watering done, I removed my sandals, went into the

house, looked for my coffee mug and glanced up at the clock on the wall, which read 2:57 AM -- whereas I was expecting the time to be a little after six. Well, the water has been off-and-on today, mostly off, and I've been out of phase for doing anything and everything except reading Byatt's novel. Last week, I did the same -- that is, I read for an entire day, only it was essays in Thai. On that day, I woke just before sun-up. Nothing unusual in that, of course, but why I awoke so very earlier this morning, I cannot say. It's evening now, the water is on again, and I should be watering outside yet again. Ah, Janjira's car has just pulled into the drive...

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Finished.

Byatt's *Possession* has, I think, single-handedly restored my long lost love for fiction. I'm trying to recall the last time a novel stimulated and moved me, and it must be 20 years ago at least. Anymore, I seldom get past a novel's opening pages, sometimes the opening paragraphs if, at all, I begin reading. But this book... it is the anodyne for theoretical literary studies that quashed my impulse to read fiction. Simultaneously an homage and a critique, at once mid-Victorian and postmodern, the telling of Byatt's story demonstrates that to have roots is not necessarily to have an uncut umbilical cord. She has respect for her literary progenitors, but without slavish worship, and there is awareness and understanding of the issues that are/were contemporaneous with the writing of this romance. In writing the book, she went with some currents and swam against others -- for some readers, surely, a lack of ideological purity. But she knows what she's doing. With Byatt, it's possible to be literate, witty, perceptive, inventive, self-referential, allusive and authentic all at once. What's even more surprising is that such a heady mix should have real heart and not just a simulacrum of feeling. If the future has readers, this book will still be read -- and I do not mean solely in MA programs.

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Last night at the Riverside I was speaking with Lance Bird and Patrick Hurley in answer to a question about which book had exerted the most influence on me during the so-called formative years. The answer that presented itself was "Black Like Me". I read it in the same year as the civil rights movement and King's famous speech. Timing seems to be the key in explaining its effect upon me. Come to think of it, John Mannick, who had received the book from his older brother, lent it to me together with "Lord of the Flies" and another book I cannot recall. A Steinbeck novel, perhaps. I sat next to John in Mr. Prather's homeroom, during the eighth grade. During recess, he played volleyball while I played basketball, so our paths did not cross at all outside the homeroom. Why he sent books my way, I cannot say.

But it's verbal asides and offhand occurrences that form us, I now believe, far more than formal lessons or instruction. It's the odd moment that has lasting effect. One such moment occurred one Saturday morning at the Minnick's home. Dale and I were talking about our futures. I do not recall exactly what I put forth, but his mother, who was a teacher, began laughing from the kitchen where she was preparing breakfast. She came out

into the front room, shaking her head and smiling, and she told me: "You'll never do any of those things." I asked why not. She laughed again and said: "You'll never fit in. Square pegs and round holes." Or maybe she said this while we sitting around the table -- Dale, his mother and his father, and myself.

A year earlier I had gone, along with my brother, from Colorado to visit my father in California. At that time, he had just moved to Orange County from a house on Manhattan Beach Boulevard, across from Alondra Park in Lawndale, which he felt was too close to the Watts riots. He may have had a rifle at the ready, if my memory is accurate. Anyway, he and I had different views of "Burn, baby, burn." (I was born in Watts at Centinella Hospital, Dr. E.S. Burows attending.) Dad drove Glen and me up to Hollister to visit our grandmother and great-grandmother. Grandmother had been married to Earl W. Gardner, Sr (second wife, Abbie), then she married an astrologer named Van Nostrand, and finally a commercial artist named Larson (a rather nice younger man whom she divorced when she learned she had cancer, because she did not wish to burden him). Great-grandmother, whose maiden name was Stroud, had been married to Winfield Struthers Rice, USN; then to Charles Thornthwaite, who died many years before we visited Hollister. It was Great-grandmother who read my palm and said that I would one day be a painter. At the time, I did not believe her.

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I should apologize for my sense of humor, but there's a new animal on the loose. Example:

Republican Senator Jim DeMint, six weeks ago, told the *Huffington Post*: "I think it's a sad day in America when the government starts setting pay, no matter how outlandish they [sic] are... This is just a symptom of what happens when the government intervenes and we start controlling all aspects of the economy..."

However, yesterday, in a letter to the Senate Banking Committee, DeMint demanded that AIG contracts be formally subpoenaed to determine why that company was "specifically exempt[ed]" from the limits set on executive compensation. Now he's complaining a Democrat-led "fiasco" caused by a "lack of transparency and accountability."

What a difference a month makes.

Question: What happened to De Mint's free market reservations about the government's interference in setting limits?

Answer: The Senator has become a Populist Republican -- a jackass with a trunk.

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## **ENTERTAINMENT**

### Sylvia Plath's son takes own life

Nicholas Hughes, the son of poets Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes has killed himself at the age of 47.

[What a headline. Hmm. Maybe the BBC understands quite well the temper of our time.]

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BBC News / Contact Us

Re: Obama's Speech in Cairo

Many thanks to BBC for assigning Paul Reynolds to explain every point that I am not smart enough to understand without help.

[Someone thanking BBC for supplying commentary by Paul Reynolds.]

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Many years ago I noticed something peculiar about sample sentences in the library edition of So Sethaputra's Thai-English Dictionary. I thought the subjects and references and allusions in So's sentences constituted something like an alternative history of current events in Thailand between 1932 and the Second World War. So had been a journalist, a publisher, and a member of the Privy Council. He began writing his dictionary while held as a political prisoner on Tarutao Island in the Andaman Sea.

Janjira and I have two copies of So's library edition. One copy is marked with my arrows, underscores, highlights and cross-references between pages. Eventually, perhaps ten years ago, I decided to write So's widow, in care of the dictionary's publisher, to inquire whether my imagination was running away with me, or, whether I had stumbled upon something. I never received a reply.

Last night on Thai PBS evening news, there was a short piece on So Sethraputra's dictionary. The reporter said there was much information about the political situation in Thailand, at that time, to be found in So's sentences. Well, yes -- I think so. Unless I am very much mistaken, there are also character sketches, personal assessments, and perhaps clues to bribery, malfeasance and murder. But I am talking about earlier editions. The current one has been adapted.

**Richard Lair** wrote: Time for you to write a crime novel, even a murder mystery. Might be more fun with the OED.

I wrote: Hmmm. While a student in England, Setraputra murders an OED editor, and later, as a trustee on Tarutao where he has time to reflect, remorse over his choice in life-style drives him to confess to murders he never committed here in Thailand.  
Interesting premise.

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English subtitles for *Angels & Demons* (sequel to *The Da Vinci Code*), a DVD with a dubbed Chinese soundtrack:

"During at present, Catholic leader from throughout every world corner differ travel come capital Rome city amazing build passing away suddenly your Pope monk person is that love. Today at Stinky Sign Peter\* the prayer with the faith appears for request get meet

newcomer leader to total up the Christendom which touch unstable with the change and the conflict one to."

\* Piazza San Pietro, no doubt

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Schools will be closed this coming week, because swine flu has come to town. Wikipedia tells me that the current strain is descended from the 1918 strain, the so-called Spanish Influenza that killed via a cytokine storm. With the 1918 edition of H1N1, having a strong immune system was a distinct disadvantage. How odd to think that sometimes it does not pay to be healthy. I wonder what Darwin would make of that.

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Today was the big eclipse, visible in Chiang Rai as seen on television. I think Janjira was disappointed again, because here in Lampang there was cloud-cover -- just another dreary morning in the rainy season. At the height of the eclipse, I could discern little difference in the light. By ten o'clock, the sky cleared and the eclipse was over.

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1 August 2009 -- a red-letter day, although the villagers may think I am crazy. Word will surely go 'round, if anyone chanced to see me rolling on the patch of grass that fronts our house. I did a somersault -- actually, two of them, because the first listed a little to the left. The second was dead center.

Why would I do that? About fifty years ago, when I was a Cub Scout, I was required to do three somersaults in pursuit of a merit badge. I had no idea what was a somersault, had never seen one, and so my tired mother, just home from work, explained it to me. We were in the front room of our small frame house, with new maple furniture pushed to the side. Of course, we should have been out on the lawn, even though it was after dark. But we did not have a lawn, just hard, pocked ground and low weeds. So, we pushed aside the furniture and I had a go at it.

The first attempt ended with me hitting the coffee table, and so I was told to be careful and not to damage anything. My second attempt, then, had the brakes on, as I tried to do a somersault and not to do a somersault at the same time and came down badly, twisting my neck -- 'hyper-extended a muscle', although we did not think or speak that way at that time. The third attempt was extremely clumsy, as I tried to protect my neck and avoid the furniture, and then I really did hurt myself. I could not do the third somersault and, psyched, I became absolutely frustrated. My neck was a knot for the next two days, in part owing to the electric heating pad that was the preferred treatment. Who knew about ice, when I was kid? Worst of all, I received the merit badge by default, because Mom

sympathetically checked the box in the Cub Scout Handbook to indicate the successful completion of three somersaults. Like I said, she was tired.

I just remembered all this, just this morning, so I went outside and did somersaults on the patch of grass in front of our house. It's fifty years later, and I did two of them, thank you very much. Why didn't I do the third? I don't know. Maybe I have no real need to show off for the neighbors. Not that anyone, myself included, has any doubt about my sanity, you understand -- just that one could save the third somersault for one's sixtieth birthday, next January.

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"We're bored. Give us something new -- and it must be historically important, a major breakthrough of the last half century." This was the post-world war environment, and it led to each and every season's advances at the high profile galleries. In retrospect, most commentators say that especially in the 1960s art became commodified, and that the apex, 'the boom', was reached in the 1980s. This is true enough, so far as it goes. Barbara Rose was correct in saying that artwork had become a medium of exchange. The tired irony, of course, is that 'subversive art' -- always in the form of a break with the past, that is, with history -- was bid up by the haute bourgeois who were often enough its intended targets. But such a comedy, I think, is not the thing that is most objectionable, because the really objectionable commodification did not happen to art. Rather it was 'historical significance' that was on the auction block, marketed and capitalized.

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When I was a kid, we called them panda bears. When I became an adult, this mistaken view was in need of correction, because pandas were not bears, after all. Rather, pandas were members of the raccoon family. Time passed, and I had forgot the classification that science had assigned to pandas. When the question came up this evening, I decided to check Wikipedia. Here we go:

The **Giant Panda** (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*, literally meaning "cat-foot black-and-white") is a bear native to central-western and southwestern China. The Giant Panda was previously thought to be a member of the Procyonidae (raccoon) family.

So, a panda is once again a panda bear -- but probably one should suggest rather than assert this 'fact'.

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Saturday, 2 October 2009

Returned home after two weeks in California and Colorado. Saw my mother and my son and not all of my few friends. It was not much of a vacation for Janjira, at least not until the last day in San Francisco, when we walked halfway across the Golden Gate Bridge, descended the stairs in the City Lights Bookstore, visited Golden Gate Park and Haight-

Ashbury, walked through the Legion of Honor (which collection demonstrates without doubt that I cannot paint), rode a trolley and ate chowder while feeding the gulls at Fisherman's Wharf. What did I manage to do, in two weeks? I talked with my mother. I went through boxes in her basement, sorting old clothes and papers and tearing up a 12-volume journal that I had kept over several years. Blowing air through a rented horn, I recorded for BIOTA, although I had not played trumpet in ten years -- just warmed up for ten minutes and away we went, with me safely in the lower register. Saw Jim Disney and his friend, Marianne, Brad McCullough, Bill Napier, Dennis Goeltl and Howard Goldman. Went to Santa Monica to see Hugo Anderson's large new painting, Napoleon the Movie, in which I recognized Madeleine Stowe as Josephine and Brian Ben Ben as the Emperor. Hugo says that he meets them for breakfast at a cafe nearly every morning. It's a different world from mine, clearly. As always, time was tight. I am tired and need to think and assess and prepare myself. Good to be home. I would like to sleep, but there are fireworks and bottle rockets in the village. Someone is celebrating something.

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Message to a former student:

A short time ago, we mentioned treasury bonds and the Chinese holdings, that these might be dumped if only the Chinese could find a buyer for the devalued assets. Recently, a more likely scenario has presented itself: namely, that oil-traders might stop using the US dollar as the medium of exchange. Of course, the American government denies this. "Can't happen." Perhaps four or five years ago, there was an analysis from Australia -- can't recall the name of the author -- that stated one reason for the US invasion of Iraq had to do with Hussein using euros instead of dollars in oil-related transactions. Another reason was fear of a blockade of the Straits of Hormuz. Another reason was to gain control of the second-largest supply of oil on the planet (so far as anyone knows). Oh, and yes -- almost forgot --the US Government also wanted to bring democracy and white bread.

Did you enjoy the comedy these past couple days? Obama wins the Nobel Peace Prize, then meets with his chiefs in the War Room. On the same day. Great stuff.

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From UK Archives:

... The **Names of All the Gentlemen of the Best Callings** within the countye of Lancaster, 1588... letter from Geoffrey Shakerley of Chester Castle re **imprisonment of plotters**, 8 Sept. 1665... letter from Charles II re **preparations for an invasion**, 27 June 1666... bond of Thos. Birch of Birch to appear before the Lord Lieutenant at York, 1665... letters of Lord Derby and Rich. Sale re **man accused of being Huson, the regicide**, 1666... letter re Geo. Cheetham, **a rebellious trumpeter**, 1663... names of **nonconformist ministers**, 1665... letter from Ewan Price "**a person of Phanaticke principalls**" to Mathew Markland, Mayor of Wigan, complaining of his imprisonment by Bradshsigh, 1665...

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### Rompuy

the new EU head  
sits down among ministers  
to count syllables

vocabulary  
may be as difficult as  
counting syllables

counting syllables  
the newly appointed head  
selects a few words

forgetting his cares  
the president of EU  
casts a fresh haiku

pushing back his chair  
the president scans the verse  
his work done for now

all the ministers  
attend the priorities  
of the new regime

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### Cleopatra

When Caesar sees 'er,  
He'll surely seize 'er.

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I'm working on a challenging new form, the Haikumerick (haiku à la limerick):

a hooker from maine  
removes crabs from her trap  
then springs it again

Hmmm. In Darwinian terms, this new form looks less than adaptable.

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## 17 & Rainy + 17 More

when writing haiku  
one must count the syllables  
and note the season

or the time of day  
with a certain detachment  
like oil on water

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Today is the winter solstice. This is from BBC News: "Archaeologists in Israel say they have uncovered the remains of the first dwelling in Nazareth believed to date back to the time of Jesus Christ."

What happens to the argument in "The Messianic Legacy" to the effect that overwhelming evidence shows Nazareth did not exist during the lifetime of "Jesus of Nazareth". On the face of it, poor Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln are, yet again, mistaken.

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C'mon, everybody sing:

This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius...  
Harmony and understanding,  
Sympathy and trust abounding...

It's odd how many different cosmological systems, in one sense or another, point to this period of time. The Aztec calendar ran out in the late 1980s. The Mayan calendar will run out in 2012, a couple years away. For many sects of Christendom, we have been for many years in 'the last days'. Meanwhile, an old prophecy here in Thailand states that we are entering a period of 'immense darkness' that will run until the advent of Metteya. Even the Emissaries (formerly of Divine Light), west of Loveland, Colorado, have been declaring for decades that humanity is entering a period of great ignorance. It is the New Middle Ages, according to a social scientist who recently grabbed headlines.

It's a tired world. I think we know that much.

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Here is a curious case of anonymous celebrity: Nadege (Finkelstein) Clair. She appears in at least two films by Ra(o)ul Ruiz, namely "Three Crowns of the Sailor" and "The Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting". In an interview pertaining to "Three Crowns", Ruiz

mentions her by name in conjunction with both films. Not too surprisingly, Nadege Clair is listed on the Internet at virtually every web-site that has anything to do with films or DVDs. She's in Wikipedia. She's everywhere, web page after web page, and after 20 pages I stopped. Not a single web-site has any information about her, at all -- not a single photo nor even a date of birth to accompany a standard "biography" stating that she appeared in Ruiz's film. Some sites state that the information is "coming soon" with the last update being years ago. Nor is she alone, because there is no information available about the other actors in "Hypothesis" -- Anna Ringard, Corine Berjot, Chantal Paley, Marthe Delboy, Dominique Lambertini, Anne Desbois -- but Nadege is unique in that the Internet does reflect a change in her surname, from Finkelstein to Clair.

The Internet lists the entire cast again and again, page after page, in the same order, only there is one small difference in each of the lists: an adjective. As examples:

The awesome cast includes Jean Rougeul, Jean Raynaud (II), Guy Bonnafoux, *Nadege Finkelstein*, Philippe Chassel...

The astonishing cast includes Jean Rougeul, Jean Raynaud (II), Guy Bonnafoux, *Nadege Finkelstein*, Philippe Chassel...

Awesome? Well, almost everyone from California uses this term. Astonishing? Hmm -- odd word, considering that the actors' performances have no dialogue whatsoever and consist entirely of assuming poses in tableaux vivants. Which means to say, they hardly ever move, except to assume poses. But wait, because there is more. The cast are not only awesome and astonishing, they are also extraordinary / fabulous / wonderful / strange / overwhelming / breathtaking / startling / staggering / brilliant / amazing / prodigious / surprising / remarkable / spectacular / mind-boggling / miraculous / eye-opening / stunning / stupendous / great supporting... and so forth, with each web page having a different adjective for the same list.

Get a load of this, about the guy who heads the list: Flixster members are collaborating to create the definitive resource for *Jean Rougeul* information on the Internet...

Uh-huh. There's not a shred of information about this guy, except that he appeared in two films by Ra(o)ul Ruiz: "Hypothesis" and "Suspended Vocation".

Two thoughts present themselves: 1) Why would someone take the time to change these adjectives; and, 2) what am I doing giving time to this nonsense? Still, how odd that anyone could be widely publicized, yet remain entirely anonymous.

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Has the reassessment, the downgrade in status, begun? It may be inevitable. Here's the line from BBC: "Celebrated as a pioneer of Cubism, Picasso is widely regarded as one of the 20th Century's greatest artists." This description is interesting on two counts: namely, that Picasso is "widely regarded" as 1) "a pioneer" rather than the creator or founder of Cubism; and 2) "one of the...greatest" rather than the greatest artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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In my mind's eye, I saw Janjira back her car into the closed gate. Usually, I open it for her as she leaves for work, but I told her that it might be a good idea to start my old car before she departed, just in case it needed the occasional jump. But, I thought, no problem. I will check my car, then open the gate for her, and so I walked around her car to my own. Sure enough, she backed into the gate. I should have paid attention to what I saw in my mind's eye.

Later that same morning, I was hammering and chiseling in the bathroom, removing stubborn tiles from the floor and wall. In my mind's eye, I saw a piece of tile ricochet off the chisel and strike my forehead. Perhaps three seconds later, it happened, and the shard left a small gash in my forehead that bled for several minutes. When I returned to work, in my mind's eye I saw a piece of tile shoot up into my eye. All right, I said to myself -- you had better listen. So I washed, changed clothes, and then drove into town to buy clear plastic goggles to protect my eyes. When I returned to work, wearing the goggles, I struck a hammer blow that sent a shard directly into my new goggles. It was travelling with the sharp edge directly facing me, and, had I not been wearing the goggles, it would have injured my left eye. It was so fast, there would have been no way to avoid it.

This is all I have to say. Whoever reads this will draw one conclusion or another.

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Thought for Monday, 1 February 2010:  
Love is like American football. It's a game of inches.

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I find that the present is an intrusion. Increasingly so. It's an intrusion upon memory and imagination. It's becoming clearer to me that I don't really live in the present, but rather in some conflation of past events and imaginary scenarios that are interrupted by the necessities -- demands -- of day-to-day existence. At the same time, I am beginning to see things that are not really there. In a room, on a street, in the periphery. Sometimes, it is a trick of perspective or because my eyes are slow to adjust to a change in the light. Other times, on some level, I must be seeing what I am thinking. The counter-balance to this is that I can watch a bird on a limb or a drop on a leaf until time stands still, and think only that these things are what they are.

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This item is one of the more bizarre economic indicators I have encountered. According to the BBC:

"In a sign that the global economy could be seeing signs of improvement, the average net worth of the world's billionaires is now \$3.5bn, up \$500m from last year."

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I just received a list forwarded via e-mail. You'd know this list before you ever had a look at it: sans serif fonts in red and blue on a white background, the point size growing ever larger as voting percentages pile up, followed by the BIG (rhetorical) Question. Not to forget the subject line: **Unbelievable!**

Oh, the outrage. Clearly it is time for the USA to pull out of the United Nations... etc. Why? Because too many countries bite the hand that feeds them -- countries like Pakistan, Egypt, Qatar, and all the other Muslim countries that vote against American proposals while accepting American aid. After all, American aid always has been humanitarian, and if you can't buy votes in the General Assembly, then what is the point of a democratic organization in the first place? With over 170 American military bases around the globe, there are other means to bring democracy and white bread to benighted lands.

Well, there it is -- the thought and discourse at High Tea. Me? I must have a hobgoblin. I don't know whether the USA should be in the UN, or, for that matter, whether any other country should be. I simply enjoy the flow of simultaneously held contradictory ideas -- the sign of a really first-rate intelligence, according to Hemingway's [*sic*]\* Nick Carraway, with whom the capacious mind of Ralph Waldo Emerson would likely agree as his synapses fire upon the Middle East.

[\* Fitzgerald, I think. Speaking of firing synapses.]

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Palme d'Or at Cannes?

I'm keeping an eye on the reception of "Uncle Boonmee". Something tells me that we are about to see the unfolding of cross-cultural misunderstanding. Here's why...

This morning I saw a newscast on Thai television and read BBC online. The BBC described this "wonderfully nutty" Thai film that took Cannes by surprise. And the story mentioned that the director thanked "all the ghosts of Thailand" for helping him to win at Cannes. Meanwhile, Thai television showed a clip from the movie (it's like drama on Thai television) and footage of the director's acceptance speech, including the reaction of the audience. The audience smiled, for reasons different, I think, than did the director.

It's Mona Lisa time. Here's what I suspect, based on the clip and the footage: "Uncle Boonmee" is a straightforward film about reincarnation, and the director was serious when he thanked all the spirits in Thailand. Westerners have mistaken his sincerity and straight-forwardness for irony and/or farce.

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This past week, the Lone Star State approved a new curriculum for its public schools. By report, the new curriculum will teach that the Founding Fathers did not intend the separation of church and state. Thomas Jefferson's view of America will be bypassed, and so on and so forth. By chance, when this news reached me, I happened to be reading a 1962 publication from Teachers' College at Columbia University: The New-England Primer (Classics in Education No. 13). The publication has a long historical introduction followed by facsimile pages of the Primer as it was published in 1727. Actually, the Primer had been published since the time of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Primers that were printed in the Colonies were direct descendants of primers and tutors published in England, from the time of Henry VIII.

The purpose of a primer or tutor was to teach youth how to read and write, and to offer moral instruction. The alphabet, for example, was taught in this way:

A -- In Adam's fall / We sinned all.  
B -- This book attend / Thy life to mend  
C -- Christ crucify'd / For sinners dy'd

You get the idea. Problems accompanying the Primer began with the Protestant Reformation, then the Counter-Reformation, later the American Revolution, and so on. The English monarchs Henry, Edward, Mary, Elizabeth, and James -- five in a row -- all had problems because of the Primer. Why? -- the Primer also included a catechism. This means that it offered a particular version of Christianity, depending upon allegiances and whoever held power at the moment. By the time the Primer crossed over to the Colonies, variant texts proliferated. The Quakers had one text, the Congregationalists another, and the Presbyterians another still. Even the deists and/or agnostics got into the act and published a secular version. Letter C, for example, reads: The cat doth play / And after slay.

So now Thomas Jefferson will join the long-overlooked freethinker Tom Paine, an avowed atheist who felt that believers should be allowed to continue to believe as they please. These days, only specialists in history or inquisitive readers know anything about Paine, the pamphlets he wrote, the influence he exerted, the thinkers with whom he corresponded in Europe, his various studies and analyses -- in short, the role that he played.

In the past, disagreements over curricula led to the overthrow of a king (James II), the imprisonment, torture, and execution of printers and distributors, and unpleasant exchanges at meetings of the school board. The problem has ever been and always will be what is to be taught and how it is to be taught.

At the same time, I would like to see Texas once again become an independent republic.

T -- Texas tea / Kills the sea

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True: Not everyone in Texas has a pompadour, crucifix earrings and too much makeup. There are pockets of resistance, and by most accounts Austin is a civilized city. Why freethinkers would choose Texas is anyone's guess, but they did establish these communities: Castell, Comfort, Frelsburg, Latium, Meyersville, Millheim, Ratcliffe, Shelby, Sisterdale, and Tusculum.

Also true: Not everyone in Texas agrees with the new curriculum.

Nor did I mean to suggest that disagreements about the indoctrination of the young are traceable back to the reign of Henry VIII and no farther. During the European Middle Ages, there was widespread concern over declining standards at university alongside student strikes, the sacking of unpopular lecturers, and forced changes to make instruction more relevant. Medieval students were also noted for burning down the businesses of townsfolk, cheating on written examinations, and drunken bouts of paid sex. These extracurricular activities were called "sewing wild oats" and sons of the richer fathers usually got off Scot-free.

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At least he didn't say "pipelines":

German President Horst Koehler says he is resigning immediately, following criticism of remarks he made about German military deployments abroad.

Mr Koehler... had linked missions such as the Afghanistan deployment with the defence of economic interests. His remarks drew criticism from a number of German politicians. He made the controversial remarks in a radio interview after a brief visit to Afghanistan earlier this month. He said that for an export-orientated country like Germany, it was sometimes necessary to deploy troops "to protect our interests... for example free trade routes".

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According to a Chinese edition DVD with English subtitles: Hitler's autobiography is entitled *Mind Calm*.

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13 July 2010 – Today I discovered that Stephen Brown passed away 21 October 2009 and added this entry to an on-line guest book:

It is months since he's been gone, yet I learned only today of Stephen's passing. We knew each other at Colorado State and, over the years since, I have followed his work. It is a loss that there should be no more of it. He was a real painter. Rarer still among painters who are any good, he was a good man.

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Double whammy. With Stephen gone, I decided to look for Tim Snode on the Internet, as well. I check on Tim periodically, every six months or so, and only today I learn that he died from colon cancer in November 2006. Why today a PDF from 2006 should suddenly appear, I cannot say. Jesus. Too late, too late, but it does explain why Tim did not respond to e-mail that I sent to the school where he taught. Well, I do not know which way to turn. With two old friends gone in a day, the Mulberry Street Gang is no more.

Tim was unique. It was interesting to see how many in the on-line guest book used that word, and it is a precise fit. I, too, say 'unique', even though Tim was one of a pair of identical twins. I never met his twin-brother, Thom, and Tim seldom spoke of him, only to say that Thom was an actor and a dancer, a musical comedian, I guess. So, here I am now, thinking such an odd thought, because Tim implied that Thom was gay, which clearly Tim was not. Yet they were identical twins. It would appear that, if being gay is a matter of genetics, then identical twins are not necessarily identical in every case. Whatever.

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Went for breakfast at the Riverside Guesthouse this morning. Lorenza, the owner, sat down with Scott [Stewart] and myself, as Scott spoke about an article he read years ago. The article proved that Jesus had studied in Persia. I listened, then told him of a paragraph I wrote several years ago, a paragraph that combined the various theories in respect of the life of Jesus. Re-arranged, here 'tis:

Along the way, I have learned that Jesus never existed, but instead he was born a Jew, an Egyptian, or an Aryan and he became an Essene, a Nazarite, a Zealot, a Pharisee, a Hasid, a real prophet, a false prophet, a magician, a devotee of Isis, a married man, an unmarried man with various lovers, a homosexual, a sicarii revolutionary, a pacifist, an ascetic, and an initiate who was crucified and died or survived – except that he was not crucified (someone else was, instead) and he stayed thereafter in the Qumran community near

Jerusalem and died at the age of forty-five; except that he traveled widely and died in France or India or Egypt or Persia at the age of sixty-four or eighty, at which time his never-found body was removed and hidden by his followers or stolen by his enemies, but these days the body is in the basement of the Vatican where they say that he was god incarnate and part of a trinity, etc. I intend no sarcasm in any of this, because I really only know what I read – if I can recall it rightly.

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“A radical rethink on higher education is needed and many universities should consider awarding more vocational qualifications”, former trade minister Lord Digby Jones has said.’

Yup, the world o' work has changed and companies are complaining that graduates have the wrong skills. The GI Bill was a dangerous thing, I think. Meanwhile, there will still be a small number of elite universities. If not for us common folks, then for whom, one wonders.

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Yesterday afternoon, a retired art professor from Chiang Mai University and his wife who paints came to visit. I did not know they were coming. Of course, they looked at paintings in progress and some that were finished. When we sat at table, the professor asked if I had seen Japanese gardens, which sometimes are small and elegantly simple, and which are arranged so that they represent an entire universe. Then the professor said that, if one's mind were clear, one's work would be clear. If one's mind is a tangle, then one would paint pictures that are a tangle. Of course, he smiled benignly. What I did not say to him, although I might have done, is to ask whether he has ever looked through a microscope. However, I did reply when we talked about gardens. He asked about my intention for the plot that we have annexed to our house. I said we might build a small greenhouse to grow plants that are not native. He then launched into a discussion of “paw, mai-paw” -- that is, of what is enough and what is not enough; and, of course, there is no end to what is “not enough.” He also said that there are enough native plants to satisfy -- and, moreover, a greenhouse is unnecessary. Well, there were several implications, but I took the most direct route. I told him that I would not own the greenhouse (Janjira alone will hold title to our property and house, according to Thai law), nor have I ever owned anything. You see, the professor owns a large tract of land that he has planted as an orchard, and upon which he has built two houses and a studio. He looked at his watch and remembered that he was running late for another appointment.

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John Sorbie was an artist who taught graphic design at Colorado State University from the mid-1960s until perhaps the late 1980s. I cannot recall the exact dates just now. He died of a heart attack in 1995 after playing racquetball. The year before that, he was given a retrospective exhibition at the Loveland Museum in Colorado, and, some years after his death, there was an exhibition at the Denver Art Museum. DAM presented John as The Poster Man. Oh well. It's accurate enough, so far as it goes. I think there will be more exhibitions in other venues of the future, and it will be not be just his graphic work but also his drawings and multimedia pieces. It will take time, because a new generation will have a different perspective vis-à-vis John's late work. Still, the day will come, and they will see John differently, without current preconceptions (the downside of labels such as "The Poster Man"). They will be born into a world in which John's work exists as a matter of course, and they will be able to appreciate his drawings of Nazis walking hand in hand with priests, with both suffering from contact dermatitis.

In 1993, John and I sat down for a rambling conversation that began, as I recall, in a coffee shop called "Paris on the Poudre" and moved to his studio and elsewhere. I had borrowed a cheap, battery-powered tape recorder and schlepped it as we walked from place to place, talking. Unfortunately, the batteries crapped out just as the conversation was becoming truly personal and interesting. I did not know until later that the batteries were failing, when I had to transcribe the tape for the Loveland Museum. Excerpts from our conversation were published in a catalogue for the retrospective exhibition. At the time I was sitting, typing, at curator Lynn Verschoor's computer – the first time I ever used a PC – and I remembered our dialogue well and so anticipated the juiciest remarks, when the tape simply petered out. I was dumbfounded. And, of course, I did not try to reconstruct the lost conversation, because there would have been no other evidence than my say-so. It would have been one step away from hearsay. Pity. I might have reconstructed the last stages of the conversation and then presented it to John for his approval, but the thought did not occur to me at the time. Now, all these years later, I could jot down what he said, because I remember it in substance – but I cannot render it verbatim, and that is what really matters. It was the way John said what he said that made all the difference – the rhythm and the way certain words were weighted that resonated. I simply cannot deliver it. Would that I could, because John was speculating about a number of things and, all the while, revealing deep contradictions that he clearly recognized but could not resolve. Then again, I think that his demons appear in his late work. In a sense, nothing is lost. Usually, when artists talk about their work, much gets lost in translation, because words and lines are different languages. John, however, was articulate in both and able to combine the two. What he said that went unrecorded may well have been a glimpse into what his next phase as an artist might have been, as he tried to sort out the contradictions that he saw. Perhaps that's the loss, after all – by which I mean to say, what might have been.

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Edited from e-mail to an old friend:

A few days ago I saw the recent film about Seraphine de Serlis, called ‘Seraphine’ for reasons that I cannot understand. You probably know of her already, but she is fairly new to me -- a domestic worker and a painter who lived in France at the time of the First World War. Hmmm... a primitive, then, as our labels have it.

A thought has occurred to me. Seraphine made floral pictures, but they fill the canvas in the same way that Jackson Pollock filled ‘Lavender Mist’. Her work puts me in mind of Clement Greenberg’s phrase “all-over painting” – or at least I think he coined that phrase. Anyway, the film makes me think about the image-laden paintings that I often produce. Now, Seraphine is different from Jackson, and James is different from both – but there is one thing these three have in common: “all-over.”

[However, Seraphine and Jackson more or less stayed there, while I have moved away – even though a recent mural painted for KD is loaded with imagery top to bottom.]

Seraphine was barely verbal, and Pollock, too, had difficulty expressing himself with words. Me? Been there, done that. It has been a struggle. I do not trust words fully. This lack of verbal facility may be one part of the explanation. But why would one have such a difficulty? The answer, I think, has to do with where to begin any discussion of the barrage of sense perceptions and incoming data. Just to begin can be overwhelming.

Pollock would curl up into a ball, in his worst moments. Seraphine would lock herself in a room for days upon days. Well, I have been in a prenatal position more than once. I prefer quiet to noise, dislike crowds (five people and upwards – so imagine a football stadium), hate shopping, etc. When I was a boy, I spent time playing basketball and football and hide and seek, like everyone else. But I preferred hiding to seeking. Used to climb onto a great shelf that my father had built in the garage, and I would sit behind the trunks and boxes stored upon it while everyone was listening to Pastor Richardson drone away at North Redondo Chapel. But Sunday was not the only day I went up there. What did I do behind the boxes? Watch, listen, think, and wonder sometimes what it was that drove me to go up there. That phase lasted a year or two.

Meanwhile, I wonder. So many things are matters of degree. Have I described an aspect of autism?

I read somewhere that autistic children do not have the sensory “filters” with which others have been fitted. Most people learn to shut out the commotion. I suppose that may mean ‘eyes wide shut’ – and I am not sure where this e-pistle is leading. I do know that it is difficult for me to understand or to express how I see the world, and that painting and writing are ways I deal with it as best I can. To some extent, they are my filters.

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Not a good day for driving to Chiang Mai. As a matter of course, considerate drivers are such a rarity as to be statistically insignificant, but today they were nonexistent. It was one of those days in which drivers distribute more or less evenly across three classes: obstacles, assholes, and jerks. Of these, perhaps 5 percent, by dint of diligence and DNA, manage to embody all three categories into a single vehicular hazard – a car with driver who tailgates, weaves, shoots the gap, runs red lights, etc etc etc – giving rise to a suspicion that wangs

are on the chopping block because some drug deal has gone bad; or, as Thai themselves more politely jest, such drivers have mothers in hospital. The stupidity and/or arrogant thoughtlessness of such drivers is beyond belief – especially when, after cutting someone off, they slow down to a crawl within fifty yards only to turn left, not from the shoulder or from the turn-out lane, but from the traffic lane, thus causing other drivers to slam their brakes to avoid a rear-end collision. The inexplicable thing is that, when not behind the wheel of a car, most of these obstacles, assholes and jerks can be patiently reasonable human beings. Go figure.

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**In the news** (30 October): A tsunami has devastated Indonesia, washing away villages, killing hundreds of people and leaving a three-month old baby, alive, in a ditch.

I wonder if that child will grow up with the conviction that it was somehow chosen, for whatever reason. Certainly, it would not be my place to deny it, whatever others may think or say.

En fin de compte, je me dis: What an exceedingly strange world.

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Perhaps it is appropriate in such a strange world that one of its languages permits the pronoun ‘it’ to refer to such a child – or any child. Never really noticed this before, that adults are ‘he’ and ‘she’ in English, while a child may be ‘it’. In French, the pronoun ‘il’ is generally masculine but may refer to ‘it’. In Thai, to use ‘it’ in reference to any person, regardless of age, is highly insulting. All part of the fun of being in the world.

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**In the news** (30 October): Many planets are the same size as Earth and similarly situated, so the implication is obvious. And with millions and millions of planets, if not billions and billions, the chances are that intelligent life... etc.

It is curious that mathematical probability is called upon to support the notion of life on other planets, but that same probability is disallowed when it indicates that life could not possibly have happened by chance on this planet. I think both the affirmation of probability and the disallowance of possibility are functions of the assumption that probability is never zero, except in the case of a virgin giving birth. Otherwise, there being so many inhabitable planets out there, more than one of them will have intelligent life along with traditional stories of virgins giving birth. Rather like legends of a global flood, on this planet. This is all part of the fun of being in any world, especially this one.

Je me suis demandé: What do I think? Je me suis répondu: I do not know a single thing of any importance. More on this mathematical probability, by and by.

[Yes. Google Translator]

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QUIT WHILE ON TOP.

Probably, no one will ever read this little nightbook, so it is a shot in the dark – like a space probe equipped with Glenn Gould playing Bach – to inform you, the reader, that I have for many years considered the words I would like to have incised upon the headstone over my last remains (ashes cast upon water... so, good luck with this).

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Today is 28 November 2010 – I noticed this date last night, while I was re-reading a text entitled *L'age d'scandale*. It is one of many sources for *Spanish to My Horse*, a story that I have been writing. Perhaps it is ten pages from completion. The significance of the date? Eighty years ago, on this day, a visa was issued for Luis Buñuel's film, *L'Âge d'Or*... which film figures prominently in my book.

In part, *L'age d'scandale* reads:

Le centenaire de la naissance de Luis Buñuel est l'occasion de rendre hommage au cinéaste du surréalisme... Pourtant, une zone d'ombre demeure sur un fait lié au scandale de *l'Âge d'or*. En effet, on parla à l'époque de l'excommunication du vicomte Charles de Noailles, mécène et producteur du film, sans qu'aucune recherche n'ait pu jusqu'alors permettre de vérifier cette information.

A rough translation would be:

The birth of Luis Buñuel a century ago presents an opportunity to pay tribute to the surrealist filmmaker... Yet a shadow remains upon the scandal that surrounded his film, *The Golden Age*. Indeed, during that period there was talk of the excommunication of the patron and producer of the film, Viscount Charles de Noailles, but this has never been verified by research.

On Friday, 26 November, I received from Basel, Switzerland (where my story is set) a book entitled *Marie-Laure de Noailles, la vicomtesse du bizarre*. Better late than never, I suppose. Then again, a month ago I would not have been able to read in French what I can now read. Anyway, on Friday I immediately read the chapter pertaining to *L'Âge d'Or*, and it appeared to me that I have been fairly accurate about the scandal – which is to say, I found no need to change anything in my book.

It's about 2 AM, and I cannot sleep. Today is the day. It would be nice to finish the book on the eightieth anniversary of the issuance of the visa, but I doubt that will happen. At the same time, it does feel as if something is coming together, somehow – and I do not mean just the little tale I am trying to tell. So, who knows – maybe I can finish the book in time for the anniversary of the first screening of *L'Âge d'Or*, at the Noailles' apartment; or better yet, on the anniversary of the riot at Studio 28. Target dates... target dates. I started this damn book five years ago. I laid it aside for four years. This year I retrieved it from a box and started over. Here it is, ten pages from completion (or so I hope) on the anniversary of the real deal. If I had planned it, this conjunction would never have come around. How wonderfully strange.

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It's done. Finished *Spanish to My Horse* at one o'clock this afternoon, Lampang time, on this 28<sup>th</sup> day of November, which means that the book has been completed on the same day in Europe. Best of all, it comes in under one hundred pages.

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Time for a little conceptual humor. A friend has lent me a DVD of a documentary called "The Aristocrats" in which standup comics tell different versions of the old vaudeville scatological classic. The premise is that, no matter how gross and disgusting the variation on the joke, the punch-line makes it funny. Let's test that hypothesis:

This guy goes into a theatrical agency and says he has an idea for a new act.

"Let's hear it," says the agent.

So the guy starts in: "The extensive wars wherewith Louis XIV was burdened during his reign..." and so on, and so on. The guy recites, verbatim, the entirety of the Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days of Sodom*, every perversion, every mutilation, every murder. Finally, he ends with, "This entire great roll was begun the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1785, and finished in thirty-seven days. Ta-daa!"

"Great," says the agent. "So what do you call this new act?"

"The Aristocrats."

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Today is Sunday, December 5<sup>th</sup> – the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the riot at Studio 28 in Paris.

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When I was a boy, I heard a story about a driver who got lost on the LA Freeway for three days. The man had come from Oklahoma (was it?) to visit relatives, friends of my grandparents, and on his way home he got entangled on the Cloverleaf and other interchanges, as they were then called. No one has ever believed this story, when I have told it over the years. However, here is a similar item from BBC News:

A Wiltshire grandfather spent three days trying to find his way home from Gatwick Airport after becoming disorientated in snowy conditions.

Moroccan-born Mohammed Bellazrak's family reported him missing after he failed to return to Trowbridge after dropping his wife off for a flight.

Police in Oxfordshire eventually flagged down the 72-year-old after his car triggered a camera in Oxford. They found he had spent from 23 - 25 December driving, trying to get back. Analysis from number-plate recognition systems showed he had driven around various towns in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire and on the M4.

Mr Bellazrak had no mobile phone with him, and he told newspaper reporters that his sat-nav was not working. Thames Valley Police took him to Oxford police station after he was stopped in Abingdon Road in the city at 2pm on Christmas Day, and after a rest, relatives took him home. He was unharmed by the ordeal. A police spokesman told the BBC it was "nice the story had a happy ending".

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C'est grâce à sa volonté tenace... que Laure de Sade, comtesse de Chevigné – "la première femme du monde qui ait dit merde" selon Paul Morand – , a conquis sa place au sein de la société parisienne.

Oh, oui? Alors, elle n'a pas dit grand-chose.

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A friend sent the Spanish film *El Sol del Membrillo* for me to watch. It is a quiet film about a painter at work. I liked it, especially the soundtrack with Gagne's music for cello.

It has been a week since I watched the film, and only now can I say what I think about it. Why so long? Because my first reaction was determined by the painter's dedication and persistence; or, if you prefer, his obsession. That's easy, because the filmmakers is also impressed. But I had another reaction that was harder to verbalize, at least until now. Here it is: I was struck by the painter's self-deception, and I am unsure whether the filmmaker intended us to notice it. That is, I am not sure whether the filmmaker is aware of a subtext. What subtext? For me, *El Sol del Membrillo* is about an exercise in futility.

Here's why. The painter seeks to fix the appearance of a fruited quince tree in sunlight and shadow, and to do that he has gone to unusual lengths: a plumb line, an intersecting line, pins in the ground to mark the placement of his feet, markers for his easel, etc. All this is to fix the moment.

But he's deluding himself. He finished his painting over a period of many weeks, in which time the sun has changed its position in the sky by several degrees. Moreover, in a single day the sunlight and shadow keep moving as the sun moves. There is no way to keep up with it, wielding a brush. The closest one can come may be Monet's paintings of the facade of a cathedral at different times of the day.

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A green-billed malkoha has been sitting in a tree outside our second floor window, about two feet away. He has come every day for a week. Sometimes I sit watching him, through the glass. We have had one or two staring contests. On the day of the first contest, after looking at me for several minutes, he jumped-flew from a branch directly into the glass pane with a decided thud – surprise! – collected himself and flew away. The next time I opened the window and talked to him for a minute before he flew away. Yesterday he flew away as soon as I opened the window. He is not so tame as I first thought – namely, that he had escaped from a cage. Also, I thought he was a coucal of some sort, because of his long tail. But no, he is a malkoha, and it turns out that malkoha are common throughout Thailand. Nevertheless, in twenty years here, I have never before seen one – but this is far less puzzling than Janjira having never seen one in fifty-two years. So she tells me.

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18 February

I was nearly killed yesterday. There's not much to say about it – a car, coming in the wrong direction toward me; a truck carrying gas that swerved to avoid me as I tried to avoid the oncoming car. The driver of the gas truck managed to regain control within two hundred yards or so. Fortunately, there were no other people on the shoulders or trying to cross the highway.

I came home and played computer chess to take my mind of it. I won.

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16 May 2011 – Monday.

Have been painting all morning. Now it is noon, dark and cloudy, and I have taken a bath. I finished three paintings this morning. One measures about 6 inches by 9 inches; another is 7.5 feet by 5 feet (begun two weeks ago); and the third is 8 feet by 12 feet (begun two years ago) – and its title is *Les revenants du passé*. When I began this painting on 11 May 2009, I called it *Revenant*. But that title was not clear enough, and some people thought I was referring to a Hollywood movie that I have not seen. So it is finished, at last, and I am glad that I did not roll it up and store it. God knows I thought about taking it down often

enough (nearly did so two weeks ago, but was interrupted at the last moment) and I am positively certain that Janjira is tired of seeing it in the studio. I have been looking at it and/or ignoring it for two years. When I finished the second painting, I set to work directly upon it, as if it were a continuation of the second painting – probably because the color was the same – and I painted out a design on a band at the bottom left, then emphasized a line at the bottom right and the sockets of the skull. In all, maybe ten minutes' work after two years of indecision. Done now, and I know it.

The second painting has no title. It began as a second attempt at a painting I destroyed at the end of 2009, *La donna dei miei sogni*. Only this time I ended up leaving the figure out, and what remains is the archway/aperture through which we see a blue sky. It feels done. Looks done, if you prefer. Anyway, I have been painting some version of this basic image since my teens: versions of *Peaceable Kingdom*; *Le monde*; and some others with names I cannot recall. No, maybe just one other. No matter. The point seems to be that the view through an archway is among my recurring motifs. I do not think that it rises yet to the dignity of an obsession, but give me more time. Right?

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It's not all bad. It's not all black. There are good things, too, in life. I hear this all the time, and it is true, of course. The problem is balance. There is no beauty or diversion or drug that is commensurate with the tragedies and atrocities that come with being in this world.

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Met with Saksith Camluang today. He is working on graphic versions of his short stories. This came as a surprise to me, because for many decades the short story has held a unique place in Thai culture. Saksith's short stories are published as soon as he writes them, and his publisher had told him last year that it was time to gather them into a collection. So, why the graphic versions? The answer is that his publisher will no longer publish short stories, at all. Why, because short stories are too long for today's reading public. At the same time, Saksith's graphic novel (aimed at those who cannot manage a book without profuse illustrations) is a book on which he has worked steadily these past five years, and it will have to wait. It's a question of marketing. First, there will be (already are) cards and tee shirts decorated with his characters. Then, there will be cartoon panels printed; then, printing of the graphic short stories; then, maybe the graphic novel. Several publishers (of books, formerly) are interested.

Saksith told me that one has to adapt to the times, if one is to reach an audience. Besides, one must be patient. In time, the cartoon panels, graphic short stories and graphic novel will mount a critique of mindless consumerism.

Sounds good, I told him – but isn't it the case that your publisher pushes slick magazines with glossy advertisements? Yes, he replied. So, I continued, your graphic critique will pit the consumerist culture against itself? Yes, he replied. His aim, he said, is



to show the emptiness of the culture of consumption – because, as Buddha taught, nothing is there.

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A letter to my father has returned from California. The address was crossed out in red and "moved" was scrawled above. An official stamp returned the letter to the sender. And that would be moi, yours truly. The odd thing is that the letter has been opened, indicated by a tear at the corner of the perforation that opens the envelope. At first, I did not notice that the perforation has been opened – not until I saw the small tear in its corner. So, I went on-line to have a look at 'white pages', to see whether the old man has moved again without telling anyone. There is no new address.

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1 July 2011

My mother is dying of cancer. The news came earlier this morning by disembodied e-mail. I'm numb. I will try to call her room at the hospital, later today ... this evening, which will be tomorrow morning in Colorado.

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3 July – Sunday evening.

Long, long weekend. No planes out of Chiang Mai for another four days. Need to call my mother again. We've said goodbye already, but ... and even though I do not know what to say, except to tell her again that I love her. Maybe that's enough.

Well, the sun has probably risen in Colorado by now. I have played computer chess while waiting. Oddly, it became another "Stalingrad Defense" – the same sort of screwball game I played before, years ago, and pasted into the Daybook. So, here's one for this Nightbook:

WHITE: Rebel Decade 10.0

BLACK: James Gardner

**Stalingrad Defense 2**

Date: 3 July 2011

Result: 1/2-1/2

1. d4 g6	6. h3 Nh6	11. Nbd2 Ba6	16. g4 Nh6
2. c3 Bg7	7. Bc4 Bb7	12. Bg5 Qc8	17. Qe1 Kh8
3. Nf3 b6	8. O-O d5	13. Nb3 Bc4	18. Qe3 Ng8
4. e4 Nf6	9. Bd3 O-O	14. Bxc4 dxc4	19. Nxc4 b5
5. e5 Ng4	10. Bf4 e6	15. Nbd2 Nf5	20. Ncd2 Nd7

21. a4 bxa4	70. Kb2 Re2+
22. Rxa4 Nb6	71. Rc2 Re8
23. Raa1 h6	72. f5 Rb8+
24. Bh4 Nd5	73. Kc1 Kg7
25. Qe4 g5	74. Rc7+ Kh8
26. Bxg5 hxg5	75. f6 Rd8
27. Nxg5 f5	76. Re7 Rd1+
28. exf6 Ndx6	77. Kc2 Rc1+
29. Qxe6 Qb7	78. Kd2 Rd1+
30. Nf7+ Rxf7	79. Ke2 Re1+
31. Qxf7 Re8	80. Kd3 Rd1+
32. g5 Rf8	81. Kc4 Rc1+
33. Qb3 Qxb3	82. Kd5 Rd1+
34. Nxb3 Nd5	83. Ke6 Re1+
35. Nc5 Rb8	84. Kd7 Rd1+
36. Ne6 Rxb2	85. Kc8 Rc1+
37. c4 Nc3	86. Kd8 Rd1+
38. Rxa7 Ne2+	87. Kc7 Rc1+
39. Kg2 Nxd4	88. Kd6 Rd1+
40. Nxd4 Bxd4	89. Kc5 Rc1+
41. Rxc7 Be5	90. Kd4 Rd1+
42. Rc5 Bf4	91. Kc3 Rc1+
43. h4 Ne7	92. Kb4 Rb1+
44. Rb5 Rc2	93. Ka5 Rb5+
45. Re1 Bd6	94. Ka6 Rb6+
46. Re6 Ba3	95. Ka7 Rb7+
47. Re4 Kg7	96. Ka8 Rb8+
48. h5 Bd6	97. Kxb8
49. Rb7 Kf8	
50. h6 Kg8	1/2-1/2
51. Kf3 Bc5	
52. Rxe7 Bxe7	
53. Rxe7 Rxc4	
54. g6 Rc8	
55. h7+ Kh8	
56. Kg2 Ra8	
57. Rd7 Rc8	
58. Rb7 Ra8	
59. Kh2 Rc8	
60. Rd7 Ra8	
61. Rc7 Rd8	
62. Kg2 Ra8	
63. f4 Ra2+	
64. Kf3 Rf2+	
65. Ke3 Re2+	
66. Kd4 Re4+	
67. Kc3 Re3+	
68. Kb4 Re4+	
69. Kb3 Re3+	

Time to call my Mom.

\*\*\*\*\*

6 June, Wednesday morning here in Lampang. In Loveland, it is 5 June in the late afternoon and my mother has died. I cannot write anything more, just now. Maybe in time.

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Well, actually the above dates are incorrect. It is the month of July, not June. What is today? A calendar is upstairs. Just had a look at it, and Janjira confirms that today is Sunday, 24 July. I had to ask her by mobile telephone, because she stayed at her parents' house last night, to assist the new caretaker who is a Karen from the hills in Chiang Mai Province. She is the third new caretaker in as many weeks, and Janjira says that Ploi may be able to manage the situation, whereas Fah and Tip could not. These days, all of the caretakers come from hill tribes, and all of them are young. Dad has been bedridden these past ten years, while Mom is now 85 and taking falls every three or four weeks. The most recent fall occurred yesterday, while she was visiting Parichat (one of my sisters-in-law) at her home in Chiang Mai. Fortunately, the fall was not serious.

Anyway, the confusion, above, should indicate something of my current sense of time. Often I do not know what day it is, and I almost never know the date. But I do know that it is now the end of July, and that my mother has been dead nearly three weeks. In the past two or three days, Lucien Freud passed, Amy Winehouse probably overdosed, and a conservative Christian in Norway decided to blow up Oslo and kill a large number of young people. These three events are examples of why I pay scant attention to current events.

I am not yet passed my mother's passing, although I have not broken down since I first got the news that she was dying. There is only a feeling, not of loss exactly, but of being lost, of being dispirited. Maybe that's the word. I cannot muster any energy, and I have no focus.

Meanwhile, the BBC on-line is disseminating death and destruction. I have never seen any of Freud's paintings in the flesh, only in high-resolution digital images or color plates in books. Freud made the long haul and has died at eighty-eight. Acclaim came slowly. By contrast, Amy Winehouse was famous at twenty-two and is dead at twenty-seven. I have never heard Winehouse sing, although I have heard of her talent and her addictions for a number of years. The official line, as of this morning, is that it would be premature to put down the cause of death to an overdose of drugs; but surely that must be it. I know this is cynical to say, but I suspect Amy decided to join the pantheon: Hendrix, Joplin, Morrison, Cobain ... all dead at twenty-seven, the magic number. Live fast, die young, and make a beautiful corpse. As it is, she will be remembered as a tragic talent gone missing – which is the only place talent can go after too much

acclaim, too early in life. How terrible it is, peaking at twenty-two, with no place to go but down.

As to the fellow in Norway, he is the future, I think, except that the future is now. The fragments that describe him lead me to suspect that he is opposed to globalization and especially the immigration of Muslims. Piecing the fragments together, a question arises: What early globalizers mixed with Muslims? The Templars, of course. However, this fellow is a conservative Christian, with weapons. Nothing oxymoronic in that, although one may wonder whether Jesus was a conservative Christian with weapons.

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14 September

My mother died in early August [I cannot even keep the months straight], and I have received word that my father is in hospital since yesterday, after a seizure. His wife, Sharon, is coping as best she can.

My mother had hoped to make the journey to California, to attend the wedding of Aaron and Susan on Saturday, 27 August, but she died just after Independence Day. When we last spoke together by telephone, I promised her that Janjira and I would make the trip to Mountain View for the wedding.

The trip was a whirlwind. The plane departed Chiang Mai about 23.00 hrs. We had an eleven-hour layover at Incheon and arrived in San Francisco on Friday morning. I was tired from playing chess all the way across the Pacific, but still I would not sleep for another seven days.

Aaron had a formal bow tie waiting for me. A tailor here in Lampang had made a dinner jacket, vest, and trousers for me, but he could not make a bow tie. Nor could I find anything but clip-on ties in Lampang or Chiang Mai. I even bought Italian silk and tried to make a bow tie for myself, but Parn Bird's sewing machine went on the fritz during the second attempt. I resigned myself to wearing a black necktie, until Aaron handed me a small black box from a company that has been making ties since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Needless to say, their bow tie looked somewhat more presentable than the noose I fashioned.

The wedding was at 16.30 on Saturday, with everyone gathered in the garden at the Rengstorf House. The ceremony was performed by one of Aaron's friends, a recently ordained minister of the Universal Life Church. As I understand it, he became a minister especially to perform this one ceremony – and that only after Aaron had ordained, just to see how the process works.

Everything went well. The Negretes, Aaron's mother's family, were there in their numbers, and they made us feel welcome. It was interesting to see everyone after so many years – nearly forty, in fact, when it comes to Aaron's uncles and aunts; and it has been thirty years,

since I have seen Aaron's grandparents, Marco and Lucille. Except for a line here and there, Lynda still looks very much like the Lynda I remember, and her manner is still engaging. Yet her friendly manner is also a shield, even a barrier, or so it has always seemed to me. The job at hand, however, was for her to make it through the reception, with two former husbands present and a current significant other. She pulled it off quite well, as if she were in her element, and it was good to see her one last time. To me, she appears content, even happy, and that is all that matters.

The following day, Janjira and I went to Moss Beach to visit Bari Evans, my old friend from Colorado State University. He drove us down the coast for some site seeing that included a lighthouse and harbor seals. The weather was brisk, and Janjira was cold, for which Bari apologized, but I found the sea air bracing. I miss the ocean from time to time, and always have since my days in Redondo Beach – but more than that, I miss the mountains in Colorado. That no longer comes as a surprise; I am a northern personality more than a beach town type, although I might have done well in the Big Sur country of fifty or sixty years ago.

Monday and Tuesday were spent doing what? It's a bit of a fog. I know that Aaron, Janjira, and I opened a joint account at Wells Fargo, to be used in the settling of Mom's and Bob's estate. There were other activities, but I can only recall the trip to Brentwood, in search of my father. We went to the last known address on Verde Court, where a man (Don) who happened to be mowing the lawn. He was the new owner. He said that the house had sat empty for over a year, and that he had purchased it seven months earlier, after the foreclosure. So, the three of us decided to try the old address on Desert Gold Terrace. Aaron used GPS to get us there before noon. There was a guard station manned by a woman (just had to write that, of course) who was helpful. She checked her list and verified that Dad and his third wife, Sharon, were living in the estate. The guard called them and learned that they were out shopping, but would return in about two hours. Hmmm. So, Aaron, Janjira and I decided to visit a shopping mall and have a bite to eat. We returned to the guard station in the afternoon, a call was placed, and we received word that Dad and Sharon were at home. When we arrived at the house, Sharon was outside, watering the grass. She ushered us inside, and, as I came through the door, Dad called from his armchair: "Hey, asshole." And we took it from there.

We stayed about three hours, and Dad did most of the talking. Aaron says that he recorded about 40 minutes of the conversation, using his i-Phone or some such device. Mostly Dad spoke about the Gardner family, but also about Pop Rice, my father's maternal grandfather. Dad spoke quite a lot about freemasonry, as well. No specifics, but just to say "We were all Masons." By that, he meant himself, his father, and his uncles – especially Dean, who was a Shriner. As my father's grandmother, Gine, was a member of Eastern Star, I assume that her husband was a Mason as well. Here, I am referring to Ellsworth Fenton Rich, my great-grandfather, whom I never met. He was adopted by his maternal grandparents in order to keep the Gardner name going. And Gine dutifully gave Ellsworth three sons: Wesley, Dean, and Earl. That was unusual. The Gardner line seems always to have more females than males, and five generations before me there were only daughters born to Emily (Pratt) Gardner. One of the

daughters was Emily V. Gardner, who married John Hazelton Rich and raised a large family. Ellsworth was her eldest, and his surname was changed from Rich to Gardner.

All that maneuvering. And how has it played out? I do not know whether Wesley had children. Dean had a daughter. Earl had two daughters and one son, my father. I have a son, Aaron. My brother, Glen, has no children; my sister, Debra, has no children; and my sister, Darlene, has two girls. We have male cousins, yes, but their surnames are Case, Rocchio, and Garver, not Gardner. Aaron and Susan have "no plans to bring children into this world" (which is understandable, I think), so there's an end to it – unless my grand-uncle Wesley's 'line' continues. I think Wesley had a son. None of this really matters, of course, but it is interesting to me, none the less. The patrilineal name should have died out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and only legalities have let it limp into the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Janjira and I returned to Thailand the following day. I played chess while crossing the Pacific. The layover at Incheon was only two hours, this time, and we came into Chiang Mai late. I decided to drive to Lampang all the same, and we arrived home about 1.30 AM. Keyed up, I went to bed about 3.00 and rose at 6.00, with the sunlight. It would be another three days before I actually slept at all. And, when I did, I went ten hours.

So that was August. When I was speaking with Dad, he said something in passing: "In another couple months or so." He was referring to how much longer he would be around. Well, I shrugged it off, of course, at the time. He is eighty-seven now, and he has a birthday in November. His own father died at the age of eighty-eight, so I think that my father has been having long thoughts.

I still have not written about my mother, but I did do a painting dedicated to her. It is called "Le pensée d'avant". Probably the correct word is 'devant', I am not sure, but the title stands nonetheless. This morning I went into town to buy cotton duck upon which to paint something for my father. The kindly man who owns the shop (formerly managed by his son, who died three years ago) told me that he would order canvas and have it within a week. I told him that I was not in a hurry.

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Finished '*Le son d'un main*' (for my father). Sent a JPG to Sharon, who says she will print it and show it to Dad. He had a second seizure about two weeks ago, and I have not thought to write anything until now. Apparently, he is doing better. And, as it happens, he has had no symptoms of withdrawal from alcohol, at all, even though it has been over a month since his last drink. Physicians still do not know what caused the seizures. A few days ago, Sharon placed him in a convalescent home.

I think I played the chess game, below, while trying to distract myself from wondering what the hell was happening to my father. I seldom manage to draw a center counter game, much less win one. This game is the exception.

White: You know who  
Black: Rebel Decade 10.0

1. e4	d5
2. Nc3	dx e4
3. Nxe4	Nd7
4. Bb5	Ngf6
5. Nxf6+	exf6
6. Qe2+	Be7
7. Nf3	O-O
8. O-O	a6
9. Bd3	Nc5
10. Be4	Re8
11. d4	Nxe4
12. Qxe4	Bf8
13. Qd3	Bg4
14. Be3	Bxf3
15. gxf3	Qd5
16. Bf4	c5
17. Rad1	Qxa2
18. d5	b5
19. d6	Qxb2
20. d7	Red8
21. Bc7	Kh8
22. Rfe1	c4
23. Qd5	Qxc2
24. Bxd8	Qg6+
25. Kh1	Rb8
26. Bc7	Rd8
27. Re8	Qg4
28. fxg4	Kg8
29. Bxd8	h6
30. Be7	Kh7
31. Qxf7	Bxe7
32. Rxe7	b4
33. Qxg7	voilà

And, today, the street in front of our house was torn up. Our dead-end is gone. The wooded area has been bulldozed and pavement is coming. Oh, well – and I have almost forgot to report that last week I bowed out of the mural project that has kept me busy these past eight years. There are four panels to complete, then I am done. As usual, my patron has been quite understanding. We agreed that it has been a good run. No doubt, I will miss the project down the line, one way or another. Still, the time has come. I have no idea what is next. Scared? Certainly. Aren't we all. Mayan calendars notwithstanding, next year is shaping up.

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Today is 25 December 2014, about 4:30 in the morning. The entry immediately above was made one evening in late October 2011.

Since then, a few things have happened. The land around our house has been cleared, a road has been paved, houses have been built, and street lights erected. It is no longer night, when it is night.

I have opened this file out of idle curiosity. Why, I suppose because lately I have been re-writing a play completed in 1975; and also because, in the past few days, I converted *Hokusai's Great Wave, Annotated* from an outmoded format (AmiPro 3.0) into a portable document (PDF). For years I put off doing the conversion on an assumption that such a chore would be painstakingly laborious and time-consuming. Yup. It was. Now that it is done, I am relieved – almost happy – to have it out of the way. Will anyone read it? Probably not – but, that's not the point. If there is an afterlife, and if Plato is somewhere walking or floating around, he won't be able to say that I failed to write a book, plant a tree, or have a son. But have I built a house? Well, I have had a hand in building houses; and, I have remodeled the one in which Janjira and I live. That's close enough to understand what it means to build one with one's own hands, I think. Besides... what makes Plato an authority?

My father is mentioned in the last entry, just above the chess game. Ah, now there's a tale. I no longer speak to Sharon. She has proved to be less than honest. She has also made questionable transactions, liquidated assets, and drained accounts. She appears to have forged documents in concert with a "team" who eased her progression through the estates of three-to-five previous older husbands. The old term for someone like Sharon is "black widow". These days, no doubt, she would be called a pro-active executor of another's estate. But, she made a mistake in overlooking the medical power of attorney, which remained vested with my younger sister. Debra is no fool, and she smelled a rat when Sharon went through me to get Debi's permission to purchase prescription drugs for our father. This is when we discovered that Dad had been placed in a facility after social services stepped in. Oh, there was abuse and so on and so on. So, Dad has spent the past eighteen months in a retirement home in Livermore, California, where I visited him this past May. He had a new girlfriend, Jean DeVrees, and she had Alzheimer's to the extent that Dad had to win her over every day. Her favorite thing to say was "Well, that's just the way it is." Anyway, Dad returned home this past week. Why, because he is bleeding internally and wants to die at home. Two full-time nurses are staying the house, because Debi does not want Dad alone with Sharon. He is not expected to live much longer, but he has already lasted a week longer than the doctors gave him. And he's eating again. Tough old bird, my father. Ninety, now. Meanwhile, the wheels of justice in Contra Costa County, California are turning. At last report, Sharon has failed to comply with orders of the court. I doubt that means much, in Contra Costa.

Two old friends died this year. Both deaths set me back. Dennis Goeltl went before Solveig Lark; while Janjira's older brother, Rachen, died from cancer before either of my friends. All this explains why I am converting texts.



Will I continue to write in this so-called "nightbook"? Perhaps. Just now, it's time to return to "*Cathars*" (the play I am re-writing). There are three more scenes to do in the third and final act. And, there are a couple paintings that I need to finish. Both were started at the end of last year (2013). Cobwebs have claimed my brushes.

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1 January 2015

Finished "*Cathars*" and sent it to a theatre company in London. *AllthePigs*, they call themselves. One of the founders responded immediately to say they will read it.

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8 January 2015 - Thursday

Une journée de deuil national a été décrétée jeudi. Après l'attaque terroriste qui a coûté la vie à 12 personnes, des dizaines de milliers de personnes ont manifesté leur solidarité dans toute la France. La rédaction du journal satirique Charlie Hebdo a été la cible d'un attentat, mercredi 7 janvier en fin de matinée à [Paris](#), qui a fait douze morts. Au moins 100 000 personnes se sont réunies mercredi soir dans plusieurs villes de [France](#) pour [exprimer](#) leur solidarité.

The placards and banners read: *Je suis Charlie. Nous sommes tous Charlie.*

Today, I turned sixty-five.

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5 February 2015

It's nearly a month later. Some entrepreneurial types manufactured "I am Charlie" tee-shirts within a couple days of the attack in Paris. Then the media frenzy of variations and mutations of the sentiment become slogan, then overnight cliché, followed by the drain to nothingness and an op-ed piece by the originator of the phrase stating that he was pursuing legal action against those who had appropriated it. Why, because he had reserved "I am Charlie" for licensing to a dozen friends and associates. This fact, I think, is our world in a nutshell. Beyond that...

It appears to me that the most cogent interpretation of the world in which we live – all things considered – belongs to John Le Carré (David Cornwell). I say this knowing that he is quite possibly a critical yet subtle apologist (that is, il est un explicateur) of powers that deal in expedience, one contingency being the necessity of Le Carré's interpretation itself. Looking glass paranoia.

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11 February

Not too long ago, I mentioned to Howard Goldman that I am still not accommodated to the fact of Dennis having died. Having said that much, this morning I awoke from a vivid image of Anita, his longtime girlfriend from high school and college, which would be nearly fifty years ago.

In school, Dennis was the epitome of *cool*, while Anita was the epitome of *cute*. Both attributes were highly desirable at the time. They were both good students, well liked ("popular"), and the fact of their going steady was somehow a law of nature – even when Dennis's coolness drove him, now and again, to break up with Anita. Well, as everyone will recall from school, breaking up is ever the little drama that leads to making up – a technique for fighting boredom and for becoming the object of gossip and universal concern among classmates. In other words, a dress rehearsal for the adult world. And Dennis was good at this. In her turn, Anita was always patient and faithful, and the two of them would make amends within a month if not a fortnight. In high school, this was as regular as clockwork, but when Dennis and Anita went to colleges in different towns, the breakups became more complicated. This is where I was called in. During their next-to-last breakup, Dennis asked me to date Anita. She had met someone named Frosty, if I recall rightly, and Dennis was concerned for her welfare because he knew something about this new guy. Besides, Anita and I were attending the same university, while Dennis and I were like brothers, so I was the ideal candidate to keep an eye on her. This was a tall order for me, but I did my best. I liked Anita, but I had no more interest in her than she had in me. I think she must have accepted my invitations for a short string of Saturday nights in order to get news of Dennis. More, if I recall rightly, Frosty was treating her indifferently at the time, so she was available. Whatever the case, the charade did not last longer than three dates, at most – long enough for Anita and Dennis to re-connect one last time. Something like that.

Because Dennis said this of himself, perhaps I may say it here: he was a jerk. He treated Anita shabbily – why, because it was cool to be nonchalant – and he later regretted it. When Dennis was completely himself and free of the standards of Hollywood movies, he would say that he should have done things differently.

I cannot recall the last time Anita crossed my mind, but there she was, in a white wedding gown, coming along a walkway straight into the camera. When she began radiating light, as in a devotional painting, I woke up. More, I woke up thinking "what the hell was that?" I cannot recall anything else of the dream, just her walking into the camera from a distance. Well, these days, because I recognize how many coincidences have come my way over the years, I am more than a little superstitious. In no sense do I feel 'tuned in' to anything, but at the same time I hope that this image of Anita is not a sign of something. There has been enough bad news this past year. So then...

While Janjira and I drank coffee this morning, I told her about this dream and also that I had sent a PDF of *Daybook* to several old friends. She was surprised to learn this, because I have not said a word about it, over the years. This is to say, she was surprised I have been writing about her. Then it was my turn to be surprised, because I thought she knew that I was keeping a journal. Frankly, I think she has so many things on her mind that she simply forgot. (And why would she

not? Difficult to imagine, certainly, but there are more important matters than my scribbling.) Anyway, I then made a point of telling her about this in-progress *Nightbook*. She asked whether she might read both journals. Of course I said yes, but I will wait a couple days, to see whether this is merely a polite request on her part. And that's married life with My Better 75-Percent. "She's the one." One day soon, I may write about those three words. They constitute one of the little coincidences I mentioned above.

It is difficult to write about Janjira. The reason why this is so is nearly inexpressible. If I were to say that she is all I have in the world, then one might suspect that I see her as chattel. At the same time, any other way of expressing it is either a circumlocution or a tortured euphemism. When I say that I 'have' her, it is in a sense similar to having a feeling, or an idea, or life in one's body. Or to have free time, or time on one's hands – neither of which is anything like having a set of golf clubs. That said, here's the verb one more time: Except for Janjira, I have no reason to be in this world.

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12 February

Took my first long walk in months. It was hard on the right hip and the left knee, but after thirty minutes the pain passed. Too many weeks have elapsed with me doing little more than sitting and typing, or writing, or reading, or playing chess, or drinking beer. My last walk may have been in October, last year – and before that, I had been sedentary for months. Since Dennis died, now that I think on it.

Three weeks ago I went to a clinic to have a nasty looking mole removed from my back. Janjira thought it might be cancerous, because it was growing and was tinged in red. The results of the biopsy came yesterday or the day before; and no, it is not cancer. Instead, it is the sort of tissue that can become cancerous. Anyway, there was a scale at the clinic. I knew I was overweight, and I expected to see the needle point to 185 pounds. Well, I have been running at 180 lbs for several years now, which is 5-10 pounds heavier than I prefer to be. So, when I stepped onto the scale, I could not believe my eyes. I weighed 195 pounds. I did not and do not feel that heavy, but there it was. The odd thing is that lately I have been able to wear my old 32"-waist trousers. I cannot factor that, because it's been several years since I bought 34-inchers for the first time. Oh, baleful day, that one. So, slipping into the old 32s, I thought my weight had dropped a little – but apparently not, and the extra fifteen pounds must be above the belt, more or less evenly distributed. Better shed it, if I can.

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13 February – Friday

Janjira's older brother, Rachen, died from cancer one year ago today, and the clan is gathering to make merit at a monastery.

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16 February

There's no end to circularity, is there. Round and round we go.

...au nom de la lutte contre l'« intolérance », pour la « liberté d'expression », la « fraternité », impose son ressentiment, sa haine, sa bêtise, son ignorance, sa dictature.

Certainly imposing *their* (meaning whoever) own nonsense and intolerance. This is always the paradox. For example, secular Puritans and the politically correct censorship promulgated by those who purport to be champions of free speech – which practice, in the end, is as intolerant as any other form of intolerance.

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17 February

Doesn't look good, does it. My gut feeling is that conditions for a third world war are falling right into place, with more of the same coming. There is too much greed, and there are too many intractable heads. It's a bad combination. What the French call mondialisation (the corporate worldview backed by military) is a failure. Let's face it: a choice between a dozen designer labels and two dozen brands of corn flakes is not a reason to live. The enlightened secular world is soulless and bankrupt. Mass media culture is grounded upon the lowest common denominator. Our public discourse is appalling. Unfortunately, the only resistance to all of this schist comes in the form of armed reactionaries with totalitarian political and/or religious agenda, because we consumerist Bobos are too concerned with making our solipsistic worlds safe for our Volvos and smartphones. Talk about ostriches with buried heads, even as Egyptian Copts are losing theirs. Copenhagen? Paris? Like the commentator explains in Gilliam's Brazil: "Bad sportsmanship." Our capacity for Orwellian denial is ever with us. I wonder whether these recent attacks will awaken, much less galvanize, the West in an age when the term "-phobia" is so widely applied to critical cultural assessments made by citizens in societies that ostensibly champion free speech. Couple that with an ignorance of history – or worse, with the romantic illusion that we can escape history, or that it is all in the past. And the present? I think that we are in a new kind of Dark Age – one resplendent in electronic technology, but a trivialized quotidian existence with concentrations of wealth that would end in a new form of feudalism. Looking at our situation, I am trying to wrap my head around the possibility of a Secular Crusade contra Sharia, because it appears that is how things will play out. The promulgators of Sharia will force our hands. ISIL is intractable, their intentions have been announced, and the jihad in your neighborhood and mine will challenge, sooner or later, all our tolerance and fine notions. The fact is, the jihadists will force the hand of moderate Muslims, too, sooner or later.

I can hear it now: "Oh, no. Of course not" – as the tenured talking head explains away what's right before everyone's eyes. At the same time, I really hope that I am wrong.

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21 February

Le Monde: Obama : "il n'y a pas de guerre entre l'Occident et l'islam"

Better to have said nothing. If history teaches anything, it is to prepare for exactly the opposite of official pronouncements.

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22 February

First thing this morning, I received an e-mail from my younger sister. Debra and Glen are in California to see our father. Dad has lasted two months longer than anyone expected. At this time, he is not in pain, but his bowels no longer function, he no longer urinates, and he is usually asleep. On Debi's advice, I called Dad's house. Sharon, his third wife, answered the telephone. She said she was tired, but with the help of angels, she is managing. The three care-givers on eight-hour shifts, according to my sister, are under the surveillance of cameras throughout the house and in the garage. Apparently, Sharon had these devices installed recently, as my father pointed them out to Debra and Glen when they were at his bedside, yesterday. Sharon passed the receiver to Dad, whose voice was weak but clear. He and I spoke long enough to say all that we needed to say, and then goodbye.

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When a young man, I read somewhere that a Spanish idiom refers to orgasm as 'the little death'. The sense of this is not lost on me – there is a moment of seemingly absolute forgetfulness and timelessness. Also, it is the moment when one feels most alive, the moment when the world makes sense, when injuries are healed and the former things pass away – an allusion to new heavens and a new earth, I know. Here I am, just minutes after speaking with my dying father, and there is no other place I would rather be than inside a woman. So it goes. Janjira is at a class reunion in Chiang Mai. She should return this afternoon, when I will still need a long hug.

Sobering, to know when one is speaking to another for the last time. When my father dies, he will leave me an orphan at the age of sixty-five. Were Janjira to go before me... well... let's not think about that, today.

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Janjira came home with 404 images of the reunion stored in her smartphone. I sat beside her as she 'thumbed' through them. She told me their names, some of which I recall hearing over the years. Strange that I did not recall a single face. In fact, I barely recognized Pong, who lives in the same village (housing estate, as they say in UK) as do we – but then, I rarely see her. She is from another province, has been a widow for twenty years or longer while managing to live in Lampang for a quarter of a century without being able to find her around town. You could say, she's a foreigner here. Now that she is retired, she continues her education (two MS degrees at last count: one in education, the other in law), she cleans her large house, she seldom goes out.

She's smart as a whip, but has no 'people skills' whatsoever. She took early retirement not long after being promoted to the headship of a department with staff she could not understand. And I recognized Tik, who is Janjira's closet friend. Tik is a devout practitioner of meditation ever since her bout with cancer. Anyway, all the women in the pictures look to be in their frumpy fifties. All except Janjira. Put it down to genes, the henna in her hair, and yoga, I guess. I still love to watch her.

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Thomas Giannotti, my mentor during MA-Humanities days, wrote to say that *Mein Kopf* made him laugh. Also, he had been reading through *Daybook* and was kind enough to say that Didion would be pleased to have kept such a journal. I have never read Didion's journal and none of her major works, only a slight novella from the mid-1970s. Beyond that, before I converted the text of *Daybook* to PDF, I seriously considered deleting it. At the last moment, I said 'what the hell' to no one in particular and made the conversion. Right for once?

After I read Tom's e-mail, I took a look at *Daybook*. There are passages, I noticed, that will get me into trouble with Secular Puritans – especially should the passages be lifted from context, but that cannot be helped. And besides, I do not always agree today with what I thought and wrote yesterday. This, too, cannot be helped. We change incrementally, and we are only as good as our experiences and our information. Or the mood that is upon us in the moment.

Meanwhile, still no word from *AllthePigs* in London. Nor any further word about my father.

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25 February

Robert Frost once wrote that good fences make good neighbors. Perhaps that was true, back in the golden age of Halcyon Then. These days, our thoughts turn to soundproof walls and related home improvements.

I should have guessed, four years ago. The plot of land next our house was sold and cleared, and when the new neighbors said they intended to plant a garden, I nearly danced. They might have intended to build an apartment complex, after all. I said I was thankful that they did not intend to build a karaoke club. And the couple looked at each other, without speaking. As I say, I should have guessed.

For two years, I ran a hose over our wall so that they could fill large jars and irrigate their plants. In the third year, they began to send seasonal fruits and vegetables our way, apparently because the monthly bill had never been at issue. We had paid, because Janjira and I were lucky to have a garden next door. Toward the end of the third year, our neighbors brought a waterline to their plot, so there was no longer any need to fill their jars. Then, they announced their plan to build a "sala" in the garden.

This word *sala* is quite broad and flexible. It does not readily translate into English. It might mean a lean-to in a rice field or a gazebo, or something akin to a tram stop, or even a complex of offices erected for the centralized government. So then, a sala is a shady roofed structure under which people gather. Given a garden, one might reasonably assume that "sala"

would signify a gazebo. As it happened, my neighbors built a bungalow with a wooden deck. A place for friends and family to gather, eat meals, and drink beer. That was last year.

A few months ago, they installed a karaoke system. This was not a problem during the rainy and cold seasons. We could hear the tone-deaf wails, but the sound was more or less contained within the sala's closed windows and doors. This is no longer the case, because the hot season is upon us. And, whereas formerly the concerts stopped around 10 p.m., last night three singers were acting out their fantasies of pop stardom until nearly 1 a.m., when I finally opened the window and whistled loudly enough to stir every dog in the village. The three singers were heedless, of course, so I ended up yelling down at them. I thought they were mindless nieces of my neighbors – you know, high school students without watches. But no. They were adults in their forties, on a Tuesday night, late enough to be early Wednesday.

This morning, Janjira told me that, sometime after midnight, she had sent a text message to the village headman. She was trying to sleep in the bedroom at the opposite corner of our house, but could not. I had been downstairs, watching a film, waiting for the noise to stop. The singers were no longer taking turns, they were now laughing and struggling for the microphone. When they knocked over furniture, the microphone picked that up, too. I finally lost patience after 12:30, when I climbed the stair to open the corner window above the sala and express my lack of appreciation and want of understanding.

My neighbors are not evil geniuses. Nor are we, I hope. But I suspect that karaoke, just another baneful application of digital technology, will "defriend" (as the social networks have it) formerly good neighbors. It's a shame, really.

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Now follows a little metaphysical intertextuality. Maestro, if you please: a bit of time travel, something akin to a play within a play, but really a text inserted into another text which is being inserted, here. The intermediary text was written around the time my neighbors purchased the plot of land next our house. So, by way of comparison, here it is:

### *Two or Three Things about Yonok College*

There are many things that could be said about Yonok College, and at other times I have written about some of them. Here, I would like to mention a theatrical production of "Cinderella" which took a prize in competition at the national level. The Yonok production expanded upon the traditional story to the point that the play became a morality tale about the consequences of greed. An unusual subject, one may think, for the theatrical troupe of a business college. More, the production was prescient, in a way, because it was mounted during the economy's boom years, before currency speculators raided the Baht sometime later.

It was a memorable night, the night of that performance. The auditorium was full, the audience was excited, and the students who performed had talent and brains. The atmosphere was charged, as if the college founded by Dr. Nirund Jivasantikarn was beginning to express itself. Even beginning to flex its muscles.

If he reads this recollection, Dr. Nirund may be surprised that I have begun writing about Yonok in this way. I had threatened to write about his day-timer, which was once the popular name for a personal schedule or book of appointments. Why would I write about that? Answer:

Because it might tell us something about Yonok's founding president. If I recall rightly, the day-timer in question divided each 24-hour period of every week into increments of five minutes. Months in advance. And the president followed it, scrupulously. Well, that's how people who get things done manage to get things done. His days were full of personal study, planning sessions, staff meetings, out-reach programs, power lunches, *kantoke* dinners, exercise, sports, domestic and international travel, and 'management by walking around'. This last item on the list suggests that the President was accessible, as he was in fact. He did not stay sequestered in an office, only to be seen at official ceremonies. One saw him on campus, walking the paths from building to building. He paid visits. He checked in. He knew the faculty, and he knew the studentry, all personally. The president even planted trees on the campus at Doi Prabat. That is unusual.

My first year as an instructor at Yonok College, now University, was the same year that the school moved from Phaholyothin Road to its current location at the foot of Doi Prabat, the new campus being situated upon old rice paddy and cleared forest. What would later become the Super Highway was four kilometers away, and the road to Phrae would be expanded, as well. In time, the Government Administration Offices came to Doi Prabat, and businesses followed. All of this happened in a space of ten to fifteen years. To think about such rapid change puts me in mind of a piece that I wrote years ago, written at Dr. Nirund's request. It turns out that I still have that piece – stored on a floppy disk (remember those?) – and, for reasons that should become obvious, I am inserting it here:

### *The Road to Ban-Lao*

There are other roads to the village, but this road has become my road. The words "my road" betray affection. But, on mornings such as this, when a poncho is useless against the downpour, I admit being irritated. I do not like the cream of cowshit soup I slide through to the college where, after washing my feet, I teach English.

I discovered my road by mistake. Many months ago, while lurching through a choke of brushwood, I stumbled into a rice paddy. The abandoned paddy was tiered, sectioned, banked, and bone dry. Off one embankment jumped a footpath. It was little more than a trace, and where it wandered could not be guessed. Having nothing better to do, I decided to have a look-see. The path darted elusively through trees and scrub until it joined a larger path pocked by hooves and grooved by wheels. A mile on down, this cattle-lane dumped onto a dirt and gravel "road" -- as I understood the meaning of the term. In fact, there were even telephone and power lines running parallel -- and these had to go somewhere, maybe to a village. This was a welcome possibility, because I was then housed in a dormitory suite that did not suit me. My stride lengthened as I mulled the Gauguinesque idea of a house in a village within walking distance. Considering rain and the rest, it should be no farther than thirty minutes from the college. The incongruity of my Los Angeles "distance-is-time" construct did not occur to me.

After an hour of purposeful walking, a piss became imminent. The isolated road afforded a convenient gulley among bushes. This was important, for I had (still have) Western notions of privacy. I was not yet in Thailand long enough to see men urinating from the shoulders of highways; or, in midday, contentedly spraying narrow alleys. No sooner was my fly unzipped than I heard the rasp of an approaching motorcycle. There I was, mid-stream and barely hidden, and worried the rider was a woman. I tried to stop peeing, but a gusher is a gusher, so I dropped to my knees and pushed the yellow jet as hard as I could. I dripped and zipped up just as the



motorcycle came into view. But I was still in a crouch, so I decided to stay down rather than stand suddenly and suspiciously. I pulled a branch around and thought myself camouflaged.

No chance. The uniformed officer spotted me at once and stopped. Without dismounting, he asked a question I was certain I understood. I knew too little Thai to explain that I was urinating, so I said I was frightened, "glua", which was true in a sense. He looked me over. His brow furrowed. Then he smiled. He seemed satisfied with my explanation. After all, why else would a foreigner be crouching in a gulley so far from the tour bus. He then asked how long had I been here, where was I from, did I have a girlfriend. I asked if there was a village nearby. He said his village was just ahead, and offered me a ride. I thanked him, but declined. He revved his motor, nodded, and peeled off. I continued my walk.

Smoke wafting through trees was the first sign of habitation. Soon a young girl, nine or ten, passed on a bicycle. She spoke English: "Goot Afta-noon." It was about ten o'clock in the morning. She rode alongside me for a time and held out some fruit. When we came to the first house, she rode on ahead.

The first house was under construction. It had a driveway piled with bricks and sand, and an old mixer churning away on grinding gears. I nodded to workers perched on a bamboo scaffold. Then I saw the officer, whose new house this happened to be. Apparently, he had just finished explaining to the workers how we had met. They were smiling broadly. When I walked on, the officer followed on his motorcycle, talking to villagers along the way. They looked up, bantered back, smiled knowingly, then returned to their work.

Across the road, a woman waited beneath a tree. Around her fell clusters of fruit. A long, notched bamboo pole was being twisted by a man in the lower branches. When I stopped to watch, the man twisted off a small cluster which the woman caught and offered me. She said the fruit was "lam-yai" and peeled the rough, flecked green skin from one juicy orb, white and membranous. There was a dark brown seed inside. I spit it out and asked if the village had any houses to rent. She said yes, maybe. I thanked her for the fruit and returned to the college.

A few days passed. I asked other instructors whether they knew anything about the village. No one did, but everyone discouraged me from wanting to live there. I thought this was odd. Then one day I mentioned the village to the house mother at the dormitory. She said one of the cleaning women lived in the village, and introduced me to her. The cleaning woman, whose eyes blinked nervously, was named Sarapee. She agreed to ask around. One week later I was riding a rickety brakeless bicycle behind Sarapee, down a hellishly roller-coaster road to look at a "rental unit" in the village. The road was so bad it was laughable, and my laughter caused Sarapee to laugh.

We careened into the village and found the landlady, a sixtyish dowager with the demeanor of a dromedary. I liked her, the wooden house, the outdoor water closet, the fruit trees, the split bamboo fencing the yard, and the padlock on the gate. It was agreed I could move in the next week, after a water line was dug and the house wired for electricity.

Electricity? Then I noticed the television antennae atop my new neighbors' roofs. Only later did I learn that this village was not the same village I had discovered earlier. But this is how I came to live in Ban-lao, and how I first became acquainted with the road. My first impression of the road holds still. There are still days when it is a delight to walk down. But it is changing very fast. It is becoming more like other roads.

From the college to Ban-lao is more or less four kilometers of two unequal lengths, the longer stretch being dirt, the shorter run being paved. The pavement begins with a dogleg to the right of a salad fork in the road -- a trivium -- at the entrance to the village proper. The middle and left-hand tines are still dirt. I turn right every day, and walk until the road runs out where it joins another road named for Wat Prabat, a temple and monastery. I live at that heavily travelled junction. My house has a number, certainly, though I do not know what it is. Still, getting there is simple enough. If you come down the Ban-lao road from the college, all you need do is turn right, then left. My house is the tall one on the right, with a lam-yai tree in the yard. Rattle the chain at the gate, or call up to the window. I will come down. If the shutters are closed, I am away or do not wish to be bothered. Then, if you leave the way you came, simply remember once again to turn right, then left. The directions are the same, coming and going.

The road runs a gauntlet through the village. The neighbors' yards are enclosed, and fences around family compounds are tall, unpainted pickets, or lengths of split bamboo. A favorite gate is corrugated tin nailed to wood, secured by a chain and padlock -- but variations abound. For example: my gate is made of wood pickets; my fence is bamboo; my padlock is burnished brass. Sometimes cinder block is used to enclose newer houses in the Saudi style -- the houses of men who worked in Mid-eastern oil fields, then returned to make archways, tiled floors and glazed windows. Their houses are of plastered brick and sit on the ground, unlike traditional houses of teak which perch atop pillars. The wooden houses tend to be grayish brown on the weather side, otherwise sedately dark in aspect. Saudi houses come brightly painted and trimmed in split complements. The older houses are virtually maintenance free. Work in the yard is still a lark, consisting mostly of sweeping the ground in the morning, pulling a few weeds along the fence, burning small piles of leaves, and hoeing the garden a little. Now and again an unruly branch needs pruning. At the present time, small patches of grass are mown by cows. Time will tell how the villagers regard their leisure being consumed by the scraping, spackling, and sanding of Saudis.

All this I see through fences along the road through the village. The road is narrowly paved, pocked with potholes and splattered with pungent green because cattle are still driven down it. Sometimes at dawn I pass an ancient oxcart, its anachronistic wooden wheels grinding on gravel. It is rubber tires that are responsible for the flattened frogs and snakes working their way into the road's surface. Motorcycles are the main means of manslaughter on Thai byways, with trucks following closely. Even in the village, one must be vigilant. Only two denizens are heedless: the nondescript dogs napping in the road, and the saffron-robed monks walking with their bowls. The monks walk single file out from the monastery every morning, their approach announced by a novice clanging a bit of brass depending from a cord. Hearing the approaching bell, villagers await the monks with offerings of food. The novice is always trailed by two or three limping mutts, each with one leg drawn up and useless. These dogs no longer nap in the road.

At first light I leave to cock crows and the sound of pestles pounding mortars. The village women rise early to prepare the first meal of a new day. A fluorescent flicker from the little market stall means meat is being grilled and vegetables arranged in anticipation of opening the gate at six o'clock. I pass a trickling of water from a small wood hut; a low growl from an old but resolute dog guarding a gate; a lithe young woman wrapping cloth about her under a naked bulb; an ancient woman, arms across her sunken chest, shuffling by, says nothing but nods knowingly; a snake of smoke slipping through a banana grove; a hoarse cheeroot cough; a

rickety bicycle clicking along a dirt path; a raspy motorcycle skirting a "soi" or alley; and around the bend, past the school-shuttle stand, comes a bass-drum's muted thump and the whine of an electric guitar. Many mornings I meet no one at all; other mornings I pass women walking in pairs, slinging purchases in plastic bags. Then, someone might greet me: "Where do you go?"

I pass, am passing, have passed. It is an impasse. I am a foreigner with no connection to daily concerns of the village. Dialect is a barrier: I teach myself Standard, not Northern, Thai. There are but two or three people with whom I speak casually, occasionally. Others call and wave from thresholds or car windows: "You!" or "Goot Ee-feh-ning!" or, more often, "Farang!", which means foreigner. Here, everyone has a nickname, and this one is mine -- for I am the foreigner, even to those who now call my name. I have no illusions about becoming Tuan Jim. I am unnecessary, yet I participate in village life in one sense -- I see the same sights, hear the same sounds, and walk beneath the same sky.

The hot, rainy, and cold seasons have each their separate texture and timbre. The morning sky may be ethereal rose grading to cobalt when a fireball arises; or it may be obscure gray when clouds walk down the forested face of Doi Prabat; or it may be impenetrable white when mists blot late November light amidst the lithe bamboo. So far from Colorado's Never Summer Range, I must still don a sweater against the chill.

Down the road, where the asphalt abruptly ends, ten-gallon potholes begin. The dirt road is alternating tracks and ruts along its safest stretches. Some sections are classic roller-coaster. Other sections are canyons cut by rushing rainwater.

One morning I happened upon a six-wheeled truck turned on its side, its windshield splintered and forlorn. A load of long concrete drainage pipes was scattered like pick-up sticks for titans. In the rain, a man was assessing the damage while the driver, stretched-out, snored inside one of the pipes. As I passed the assessor, I said: "Rough road, huh?" He smiled and said help was coming. The truck had spilled in deep ruts running before the cattle driver's hut. That morning, there were no cows in the corral or in the field. Instead were bulldozers parked blade-to-track like horses standing nose-to-tail. And I remember the sky, as well. It was unusual -- a line of low cloud, straight as a blade, had sawed off the top of Doi Prabat.

It is along the dirt stretch where one is most likely to hear birds call or sing. My favorite call is a Mozartean three-note motif rising a major second with each repetition. Whistling while I walk, I have extended it to a theme for string orchestra. Really, it should be written down and recorded. One day I may see the little chirper whose song this is, and have to discuss royalties.

There are strange plants and flowers along the road, in the compounds, across the fields. Oval leaves hanging over a fence can be a foot in breadth; needles and fronds are common. Job's tears and devil's cotton, the bel and dragon trees, snakeroot and bullock's heart, the pudding pipe and pigeon pea. These, says a guidebook, are their names -- but which is which, I wonder. And here is a useful fact: local ghosts flee camphor.

I sometimes forget this place is enchanted. It is the presence of spirits which makes the villagers wonder about my walking the road alone after sundown. I am often asked if I am afraid. At dusk, darting bats clear my head at the last second. They swoop after the teeming gnats that fly up my nostrils or into my eyes. Then there is a web across my face. From where? There is nothing overhead from which it could hang.

A file of black cyphers slips by on motorcycles laden like pack animals. With machetes slung over their shoulders, the riders are returned from the forests. Their shrouded anonymity contrasts strikingly with a fashion plate in a floppy summer hat. She slows her shiny motor

scooter and smiles: "Pai-song-mai?" -- May I take you somewhere? She is travelling the opposite direction, and I suffer from esprit d'escalier.

I pass a corral like none I ever saw in Colorado: a scarecrow enclosure of lashed branches and bamboo, with vertical boards of unequal length and width left unsawn for an unforeseeable future need. The son of the cattleman careens down the hill behind me. He is racing a rusted English three-speed with bent front rim. I once thought everyone in the village shared this one bicycle, but one day I saw two people riding alongside together, then a third pumping along a soi, and all three were on rusted English three-speeds with bent front rims.

The rheostat of heaven is turned down low. Soon darkness will prevail. When the moon is full, I still see colors and walk with my shadow which passes over other shadows. In the chalky silver light, only shadows are substantial. All else is but props upon a stage. In winter, the arid night air stretches sound as on a thin wire taut between two cans. Rains in August bring the sine wave hum of electronic insects and the antiphonal choirs of electric frogs. An intense dot of white light flashes a microsecond and is gone; then another and another, like lights in a series in the tall grass along the road or a will-o'-the-wisp floating eerily across a field -- fireflies, flickering on and off in the dead dark. And over my shoulder loom the blue and red tower lights atop distant Doi Prabat.

The new harsh and glaring lights at the gate of the ceramics factory are behind me now. They were just installed and must have some utility, but they make it difficult to see the contour of the road. I must shield my eyes. In two years of walking this road, it has never been so dark that artificial light was necessary. There was always the moon or the stars. Except once.

I remember a storm, a diluvian downpour, one Mars black night. Yet when lightning cracked to the right or left, it was instantly noon. I crouched low, ankle-deep in water, scared shitless, and watched electricity arc overhead. The storm had gathered from nowhere in a matter of minutes. I remember thinking I might make it home in time -- then thinking I would be fried. I remember saying a short prayer.

And I remember another night, walking by a "ngan-sop". Such funeral rites are especially common in the cold season, when old people pass in their sleep. I was returning home from the college after an early exit from "Volunteers", an asinine movie about Peace Corps workers in Thailand. The Thai staff with whom I watched the movie were politely attentive, but I was embarrassed and had to leave. Coming down the Ban-lao road I heard loud music and voices and chanting. Farther on, over the trees, was a nimbus of bright light. As I entered the village and began to distinguish sounds, it became clear that the charivari was along the way to my house. I drew closer. At last the winding road brought me to the house in mourning. Under blinding lights, monks droned in Pali and men drank rice whiskey. The narrow lane was jammed with cars. Numbed faces floated around a bier towering over a pickup. The bier was flower-festooned gold regalia, red calligraphy, and bits of colored glass surrounding a great black and white photograph of the deceased. Passing soberly, I thought of the silly movie I had left behind. At home, I stretched out upon the mat under my mosquito net and listened to drums beat until dawn, when the syncopation just evanesced into pale pink light. I got up, bathed in cold water, towed off and dressed. I passed again and heard a lone monk chanting through an open door. Outside, under a canopy, the remaining few sat vigil while staring at a television game show from Bangkok. Nothing strange in this. I did say that the road is changing. It is merely linking up with roads of the larger village.

In the past year I have seen many changes which began with stakes here and there. It was at first difficult to guess what the stakes might signify. There were few of them, and they marked either the edge of the forest or the edge of the road, the two being one and the same. Also the stakes did not look like stakes. Instead of being one-by-twos topped with red, yellow or blue streamers, they were short lengths of bamboo or broken pickets from village fences. When I walked home one evening to find a junction outside the village somewhat wider, I thought road improvements were coming. I thought the ruts might get filled. But another evening I came down the road to find a field scraped raw. The brush was gone, and it was clear someone with a bulldozer had blueprints. Soon cement posts went up and barbed wire was strung to secure the clearing. A gate was built, and heavy trucks began to come and go. All this activity was on one side of the road and did not seem so bad after a time. It was later, when bulldozers razed the road's other side, that I knew the trees were finished and that the village's Northern Thai name, "Ban-lao", meaning "forest home", would become meaningless.

These days, in early morning, I see the ox carts less and less. To see a cart at all, I must leave when chickens are rousing themselves in the dark. I think I understand why. It is no longer possible to travel this road without keeping an eye to oncoming traffic. When I first walked this road, I seldom met another soul. Now it is rare to meet no one. The day of traffic updates is coming. The road's east side is staked, but the west side tells the story.

A swath of asphalt gleams in the hot sun. Neat tract homes are going up. Lawns along the walkways are greening up. Palms have been placed, braced by triangulated supports. A man-made pond will soon have fish. There will be a flower garden, too, and convenient places to park in front of the row shops. Already, there's non-stop disco from a new nightspot.

A quarter-million baht model home opened yesterday to the boom of canon. Last night there were gala klieg lights, soft drinks, outdoor double-screen cinema, flash, glitz, and guitars. Cars and motorcycles came and went. All that fun with only occasional announcements from the sales office.

Nine parallel swaths, new roads with fashionable English names, roll over the roiling, once-forested knolls. Big blades have cut and cleared all the way to my road. The last of the trees and brush are pushed into pyres. Haphazard huts have been thrown up for laborers. While the work holds, they can save a little money. And there is much to do: earth is banked along the road and must be leveled smooth; trenches must be dug; pipe must be laid.

Curb and gutter are coming. Then more asphalt. The road has changed and is now more like other roads. But if you had not seen it before, how would you know?

Here in northern Thailand, it is customary to write a book of remembrance upon a passing away. Those left behind will read the book and remember what was good about the departed. Knowing this, I thought I would tell you about the road to Ban-Lao, now that it is gone.

That was then.

Hmm. Curious. I must admit that I wrote the words above. And, I must say that, reading them again after so many years, the voice sounds to me like someone else's. Of course, the piece was written with the idea that it should be part of a collection of recollections, a record, to be read by future foreign teachers at Yonok. At least, that is how things were explained to me at the time – and that fact may account for the point of view and the overall tone. But, as I recall, it was also

my mood at the time. It was the mood that brought me to Lampang from Colorado. It is pessimistic and elegiac, whereas the mood at Yonok College, in those days, was generally quite the opposite. At Yonok, the atmosphere was optimistic and energetic – a feeling of openness and possibility that can be readily ascribed to the personality of a single individual.

So, here I am, twenty-one years later, writing about Yonok for a reader of the future, a reader who is likely to be a member of the Jivasantikarn clan. This piece, which is really two pieces pasted together, is to be part of a collection. A book of remembrance. My part, then, is to pass to the reader something that I remember. Something about Yonok. Well, there are many things that I remember. But what I remember most of all about Yonok is the sense of open possibility. That was the atmosphere at Yonok. Open possibility. It affected everyone there. It was in the air.

End of insertions. Now we are back, four years later still. All I have to say is that now I know which bird sings the Mozartean three-note motif. Almost every afternoon, a /collective noun/ of these little chirpers swoop down to bathe in the clay baths set atop the wall enclosing our garden, on the opposite side of our house, away from our neighbor's garden and sala, where they like to visit once they've cleaned up. And yes, you're quite right: I have no idea what these birds might think about karaoke.

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Have been sitting on my hands, waiting for word that my father has died. Not yet.

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26 February

My father's fists. In every picture of my father, his fists are clenched. It matters not whether he is sitting at table or lying abed, his fists are clenched. In one picture, my brother and my father are squaring off for fisticuffs. Good naturedly, of course. But when I saw Dad face-to-face last May, he told me that he loves to fight. This was immediately after he was attacked from the rear by another inmate (sorry: resident), while he was sitting at table talking to me. Dad took a sharp blow to the head, turned around to face his assailant, who backed off, and then Dad returned to me and said, in an undertone: "I'll take care of him later." Dad was 89 fucking years old at the time. After I departed Tiffany Gardens, I have no doubt that Dad punched the other guy flush on the chopper. Frontal assault, not from behind. More on this, by and by. Have been working in the garden this morning, and now it's nearly noon. Tired. Tired of waiting to hear that Dad has died.

For three days, I have tried to watch Carné's *Hotel du Nord*, but I have only managed half of it. Cannot concentrate, and so I understand maybe ten percent of the dialogue. After three attempts, it seemed futile for me to try again. So, I deleted the file last night.

This morning, I am thinking that I should have clenched my fists and tried harder. Merde.

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26 February, later in the day

Why am I dating entries? Previously, I seldom, if ever, did that – not in *Daybook* and not here, in *Nightbook* – at least not until fairly recently. Well, with my father dying, time is on my mind more than ever. Not to be morbid, but I suspect that, lately, I have been getting a glimpse of how I might die – assuming that I do not first hang myself, or get shot by an irate husband, or get clipped by a car while walking along the highway. Why? How? My body is changing fast with age, and one recent delightful change is the onset of allergies I never had before. With allergies comes mucus, and this is what, I think, will do me in, down the line. I will drown, or suffocate, in phlegm. I started coughing up this objectionable substance a few months ago. Occurrences are more and more frequent now, and for longer duration. Yesterday was a record: three hours. The previous high was maybe thirty minutes. Couple this with the closing of my nasal passage every night now, when I retire. See what I mean? If you can't breathe through your nose, and your throat is clogged, voilà. You're dead.

Worked in the garden this morning, and again this afternoon. Just now, the sun is setting. It's an angry orange-red. As William Inge somewhere wrote, it looks like it's gonna put up a fight.

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Same day, later still

*A Tribute to Miles* was recorded in 1992, in Germany, a year after Miles Davis died. I am listening to it, as I type. This recording features Miles's second great quintet, the one I grew up with: Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Tony Williams. (I learned about the first quintet later. Yes, it was great.) Of course, standing in for Miles is Wallace Roney. Only he isn't just standing in. The man can play. The story goes that Davis gave Roney his red trumpet after Montreux. Of course, Miles got it right. He always recognized new talent.

In 1995, I heard Wallace Roney for the first time. Quite serendipitously. Having come to Thailand in 1990, I did not know what happened at Montreux until very much later. But, in 1995, I was back in Colorado, repainting murals at a state historical site. The project, as it turned out, entailed working in the fourth tier of Dante's Inferno – but that's a story for another entry on another day. The thing is, every day excruciatingly loud psycho-rock was played continuously below, while I was on the scaffold some thirty to thirty-five feet above the floor, which itself was being ripped out, and on and on. Pure hell. To save my ear drums, I always wore ear plugs and a "sound proof" head-set that looked like stereo ear phones. Nevertheless, the noise remained deafening, only less direct. HOWEVER... one afternoon the music changed. Someone must have switched radio stations, and I heard this trumpeter ripping through "Gone" like he owned it. It wasn't Miles, who first recorded it with Gil Evans for the *Porgy and Bess* album, but it was someone who was influenced by him. I immediately removed the head-set, pulled out the ear plugs, and stopped painting. I was amazed. When the piece ended, the announcer said "That's Wallace Roney..."

Who? But I did not forget the name. Some years later, in Thailand, he and I crossed paths again, when I found a CD of the Montreux concert at a shop in Chiang Mai. A reviewer at *Time Magazine*, in describing this concert, wrote that Miles sounded like an oxygen-starved flame -- but the sputters were brilliant. Sounds about right.

Anyway, I remembered Wallace Roney's name. He took some of Miles's solos and did right by them.

I think life has not been easy for Mr. Roney. He's his own man, on trumpet, but too many are ready to nail him for having been influenced by Miles. As if one should not have influences, and as if Roney has nothing of his own to offer. What nonsense. Here I want to say two things. First, if Roney were nothing but a clone, the second great quintet would not have recorded with him. Those guys are the real deal, period – and it takes one to know one. Second, carrying the mantle that Miles laid on Roney has to be a mixed blessing, at best. A lesser musician than Roney would have sunk. Instead, as I know now, he's been sailing for years, during a time when jazz is no longer appreciated as once it was. The music lives, every time Roney picks up his horn.

Miles knew what he was doing. Wallace Roney is unique. And he has roots. That's a powerful combination. If I could, I would tell him: "Hang in there, Wallace. There aren't too many like you around." Maybe I can find him on the Internet...

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27 February

Did not sleep at all last night. Just laid in the dark.

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Documentary. Art Historian (with piano tinkling in the background): "At this time, Van Gogh must have been feeling destabilized" – meaning just before his ear was detached and he was de-released to a facility for intensive undestabilization therapy. Crikey.

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Today is Saturday, 28 February 2015. I have just rewritten the opening sentences of this journal. Ponderous voice-over: *Thus ends the textual time warp that is... Nightbook.*

Today's news: According to *Le Monde*, the Internet has been declared a public utility in the U.S. According to *Libération*, Islamists are destroying ancient artifacts inside a museum in northern Iraq. Also, Mr. Spock (a.k.a. Leonard Nimoy) has died. He was 83, to speak of time warps.

Maybe now is the time to say it. Time is fraudulent, somehow. I cannot say exactly why, but I also cannot shake the suspicion. I do not mean that time is illusory, as physicists or philosophers are pleased to suppose. Time is real – that is, it exists – but there is something of the con about it. The past, the present, and the future play like three-card Monte. Find the lady. Trouvez la dame. Cherchez la femme.

Ou quelque chose comme ça. Hm. Maybe it is women who bring to time its fluidity, at least in the mind. And then, by and by, everything else starts to run together, all the way to Marvell's ocean:



The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas...

Oddly, Marvell's poem is titled *Thoughts in a Garden*, and it is when I am working in our garden that I have such thoughts, as well.

Still no word about my father. The sun is up. It's time to work in the garden.

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1 March

Finally received a message from my brother: "Haven't heard much about dad, only that the day after we left he woke up wanting oatmeal for breakfast and then a hamburger for dinner. Beats the crap out of me."

Understood. In December, our father was losing blood copiously. The doctors gave him less than a week. Two weeks ago, he stopped urinating and defecating, and he also stopped eating, so the doctors gave him three to four days. Now, he wants a hamburger.

Debi says that Dad won't go until he's damn good and ready. That sounds about right.

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2 March

I am weary and wary of the "-phobia" suffix. It's everywhere. For example, in French on-line newspapers: homophobie (*Le Monde*); Islamophobie (*Libération*); Chrétienphobie (*Boulevard Voltaire*). This same crap is excreted in the American press. Politicized and polarized phobias appear to equate particular forms of disagreement or dissent or discord with irrationality, even mental illness. Just tack on the suffix and voilà, a new malady. A new demon.

Question: is there such a beast as *phobophobia*? More properly, this last one could be called FDR Disease: the fear of Fear itself.

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3 March / [Halte aux discours de haine qui attisent le choc des civilisations](#)

Afin d'empêcher l'affrontement entre le monde arabo-musulman et l'Occident, il faut agir contre la parole raciste au Nord comme au Sud. Et relancer le « printemps arabe ».

Sounds good. We can curtail free speech while promoting free speech, both under the banner of *les droits de l'homme*. Meanwhile, what of those who oppose another Arab Spring? Well, they should listen to [our] reason.

Agreed, we humans cannot continue in our many disagreements and divisions. We need unity.

But whose version of unity? So-called 'free markets' or a McDonald's in every city of the world will not unite humanity any more than will Facebook or Google or surveillance or enforcement of politically correct speech.

Les droits de l'homme cannot accommodate djihadisme any more than the latter can tolerate the former. Iconoclasts and iconodules will never get along. Nor will the right and left reconcile.

A worldwide republic will not succeed. Nor will any totalitarian alternative. And nor have I any solution to offer.

Nothing works. Open borders do not work. Closed borders do not work.

Meanwhile, we still have all those nuclear toys, and the environment is... on connait la chanson.

Out in the garden, I have been thinking of Napier's proposition from thirty years ago. He asked whether I would push the button. No, not a button to launch some preemptive strike. Instead, Bill was suggesting something less destructive and far more simultaneously immediate. He was suggesting the painless erasure/removal of humanity from the planet. In a twinkle, as it were. The rest of the natural world would continue. Presumably, over time, the Earth would renew itself. Just push the button, and all the people are gone. No pain. Not even a slight realization. Just the removal of everyone along with yourself. Would you push the button?

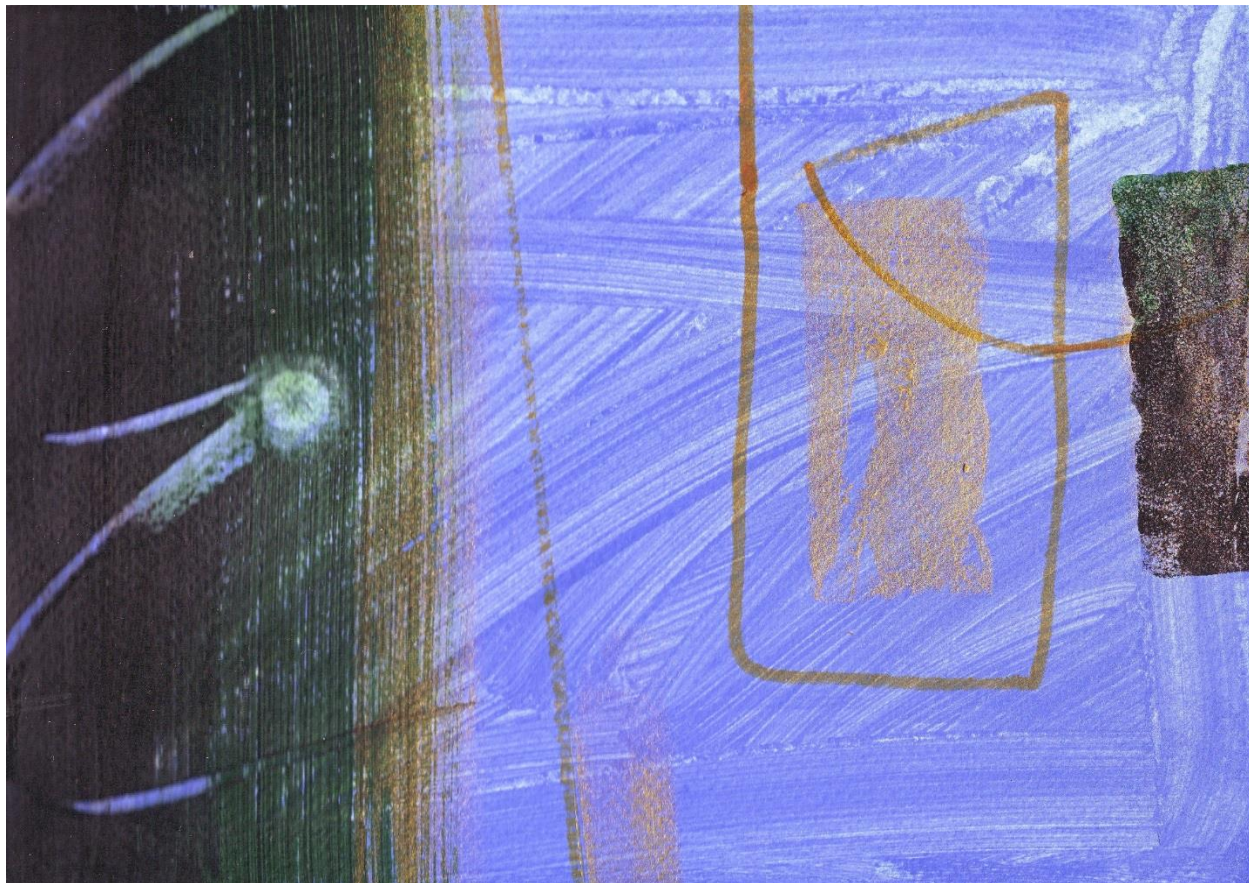
Yesterday, I thought yes. Today, even with a dark hound at the door, I am not so certain. Tomorrow is a Buddhist holiday:

ขึ้น 15 ค่ำ เดือน 4 วันมาฆบูชา (Magha Puja, I guess, using Roman letters)

Janjira will have the day away from work. Maybe I can persuade her to meet somewhere for lunch. Life still has its small anticipations, you see, and she's the main reason I would not push the button. At the same time, she recently told me that she would push it. You can see where I stand in her affections. But, never mind.

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# A DOMESDAY BOOK



*Au cours de cultiver une grande marginalité, il faut trouver un autre genre d'une vulgarité épouvantable et aussi la réputation de provoquer des duels.*

Voilà, la dernière mutation d'une esprit *complètement détraqué*.

Friday, 13 March 2015

Last night, I received word that my father died. He was ninety. It is six o'clock in the morning, now; the window is open, the sky is growing lighter, and a dove is calling in the distance. When I received the news, Janjira had already gone to bed, and I sat in the dark, searching the Internet. Search, search, search. For what was I looking?

It was too early for an obituary. I learned, however, that there is an athlete of my father's name. I also found one of my father's two younger sisters. Their names were Donna and Lee (surely a nickname).

I could not find Aunt Lee's son, Michael Garver, except that he had graduated Whittier High School in 1963. But, I found his sister, Donna Jo. The last time I recall seeing Donna Jo was in 1958, at a ballet recital. She was twelve. Her hair was stylishly "pixie"-cut in the manner of Audrey Hepburn (who, in fact, she resembled); and, thanks to a costume that Humbert Humbert might have designed, her budding left breast was exposed. She was beautiful. Easily the most beautiful and graceful creature on the stage. I was a mature young man of eight, with a wide experience in meeting lithe dancers at doors backstage, so the Born-Again or the Secular Puritan among us will remain unlikely to understand, much less forgive, my natural interest in this otherworldly nymphet.

According to electronic data, my balletic cousin spent thirty years or more selling title insurance. She was a successful 'people person', a good mother, and a volunteer with the Ventura County (Ojai) Humane Society. One bio-article about her included a photograph that I estimated to have been taken when she was fifty years of age or so. She had an extremely objectionable (to my eyes, anyway) LA-postmodern haircut, but her face was immediately recognizable. Her surname is now Sepulveda-Weber, so there is a story in that.

I could not find Aunt Lee, who died many years ago. The entry for Aunt Donna, who married a psychiatrist named Patrick Rocchio, shows her living in Long Beach. However, she lived on Catalina Island for many years, so the entry must be quite old. Last December, when doctors said that my father would be dead in a week or so, news arrived that Donna had suffered (as they say) a stroke. I am not sure, but she may have returned to the mainland to live with my cousin Susan, who is a nurse. Susan is younger than myself. I have not seen her since 1964, when my mother remarried and moved us to Colorado. I did not see my Aunt Donna from 1964 until 1997, when I returned to Colorado for a short period. Donna and my cousin, Elizabeth, came to my sister's house for Thanksgiving. A gathering of the clan. There is a photograph of us sitting on a stair, in generational order. However, it is my mother's brood, so Donna and Beth (these days 'Liz') are not in the photograph. Back in the early 1960s, my mother and my Aunt Donna took us cousins camping at Big Bear. Twice, as I recall. On one of the outings, I had a scorpion in my sleeping bag. But that's another story.

I could not find my cousin, Patrick Rocchio, Jr. In 1997, he was with the Clinton Administration in some capacity. My Aunt Donna suggested that I should not try to make contact with him. It turned out that she, herself, had little contact with him. Apparently, Patrick died of alcoholism, sometime around 2000.

What were their names? Patrick, Elizabeth, Susan, Mark (?), Matt (?), and Kit (?) – I cannot remember. Aunt Donna's children – a large Catholic family. It's even more hopeless with my Uncle Neil's family. My mother's brother was a member of LDS (Mormons), and his children were Noel, Alan, a sister (Kathlene, was it?), followed by Michael (?), and then perhaps four others, all of whom I have never met. A scattered, modern American family. Have not seen any of them in fifty years or more.

Anyway, my father has died. It seems fitting that he should be the first entry. And I am calling this journal, if I stay with it, what? Ah, *A Domesday Book*. Perfect. Why, because family and ancestry have been much on my mind lately, and one of our family's foundational myths is that the Gardner line descends from a daughter of William, Duke of Normandy. Who knows... it may even be true. Would that matter? Yes, of course, you peasant. Kneel, damn you. Either that, or help me distribute these pamphlets to organize a strike.

Genealogical currents. DNA. Epigenetic factors. Imprinting that stretches back for millenia. These are the factors that form us. These are the things we struggle against.

And, my dad is dead.

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It's about 9 o'clock. My trousers are hand-washed and hanging on the line outside. I have made a sour celery soup, now simmering on the stove. Apologies for alliteration.

Talked with my brother by telephone. He repeated what my sister told me last night: Dad's ashes will be divided. Half will go to Wyoming, where, as a young man, he worked at the Morris Ranch. That's what Dad wanted. The other half will be deposited into a fish-feeder off the coast of California. Living (g)Reefs, I think, is the name of the business. My sister believes Dad would hate this, and Debi is probably correct – but Dad's wife wants it. I told Debi that, with any luck at all, maybe the head and heart would end up in Cody. But, while talking with my brother (and being subject to the humor that comes with Gardner DNA), I said that the division of ashes might not be such a bad thing – why, to separate our father's brain from his genitalia, for once. Glen laughed. Debi and he often lamented Dad 'thinking with his dick'. Of course, in some quarters, this is a general complaint about the male of the species.

Welcome to our clan. We are like this. There's more: Glen mentioned that he is worried about Debi. She is 'on the tilt' (new idiom for me), he said, losing weight, frazzled. Too much stress, between Dad, her profession of valuation and assessment, and caring for her aged husband who is now eighty and recovering from surgery on his knees. So, after telling Glen that cousin Donna Jo is connected with the Humane Society in Ojai, and relaying the fact that this organization has an euthanasia unit, I suggested that, should the strain become too much for Debi, we might make an arrangement with our cousin, put Debi's husband in a horse costume, ship him to Ojai, and have him put down. It was just a suggestion. More seriously, Larry is recovering, and it has not been easy. I believe this most recent surgery was the third round. Last night, when I asked Debi about Larry's condition, she said this time he is healing.

Good. Also good is that my other sister, Darlene, made contact with Dad not too long ago. She made the trip to California, and also spoke with him by telephone before he died. He was clear as a bell, both encounters.

All's well that ends well. The four of us will miss him.  
Goodbye, Pop. This is your eldest speaking. Love you, Dad.

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However, I may not be the eldest. I may have a half-brother in Cody, Wyoming. He would be in his seventies, if I found the correct retired judge – and if Dad mentioned something factual rather than fantastical to Debi. This fellow's surname is different from ours. As Glen pointed out, the fellow may know nothing of his natural father. Why jolt him? At this late date, better to leave it alone.

Yes, it bothers me that I do not know for a certainty.

\*\*\*\*\*

15.00 hrs. Mid-afternoon now. Have returned home from town, where I met Kris Kincade at a small eatery that serves European brews. We raised our glasses.

I should correct an error. I said that I had not seen Aunt Donna or my cousins since 1964. Not so. I forgot about returning to California in the summer of 1966. Dad sent airline tickets for Glen and me. We went out for two weeks, as I recall. This was about the time of the Watts riots, and my father was living with his second wife in her house on Manhattan Beach Boulevard, across from Alondra Park – well, a golf course that abutted Alondra Park, not too far from El Camino College. Sorry, Junior College – or so it was at that time. So, it was in 1966 when I saw Aunt Donna and my cousins for the last time until 1997, at Thanksgiving. And yes, "Lee" was a nickname. Aunt Lee's name was Beverly. My father, Aunt Donna, and Aunt Lee grew up in my granduncle's house. Uncle Dean... and Aunt Hazel, whose daughter was named Betty Jo. Betty Jo married an engineer, Ken Hulet, and spent her life in Walnut Creek. I knew her daughter, my (third?) cousin Carrie, who liked to draw cartoons of Bud Collier, a 1950s game show host. The caricatures were quite good, I recall.

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19.00 hrs. It's dark outside. I am waiting for Janjira. When she finished work, she went to practice yoga. After that, she went to physical therapy, where she is receiving treatment for 'office syndrome'. The symptoms began last week. Once she is home, we may open a bottle of cabernet sauvignon, seeing that we are out of malbec. Néanmoins... à la vie.

\*\*\*\*\*

Found this tucked away, then sent it to old friends; and now, as you can see, am inserting it here:

Kestral at Dusk

Across, across and away;  
Farther now – across  
Fields of stubbled time –  
This darting flight – free –  
(So far as one understands)  
Downwind, then skating again  
Up – the loft and lift of it  
With sheer clarity  
Of glide and grace and hue  
Suspends – in the blue half-light –  
Infinity, with this  
Pulsing of an eye;  
Beating of a wing – now gone,  
Over Mary's scattered ashes,  
O'er the cottonwood breaks,  
Over medians of memory, fly,  
Damn you – farther on,  
Across, across and away...

No, I did not write these lines for my father. I think this was written in 1997, back in Colorado, probably in September, when I received word that, after returning to London, Peter Gonsalves had jumped in front of a train. I went outside for air, began walking, and saw the bird.

\*\*\*\*\*

Saturday, 14 March

Already, you can see: It is not the purpose of this *Domesday Book* to determine what taxes had been owed during the reign of King Edward the Confessor. Fear not, gentle reader, your land and livestock remain yours in fee simple absolute – or whatever other formula means 'free and unencumbered'. Naturally, as I dislike being taxed, I would not levy a tax upon fellow, heavily armed, foresters. (Hear the chickens clucking?) Nor is this journal "'the Booke of Judgement" ... because its decisions, like those of the Last Judgment, are unalterable'. Not at all. That sort of Anglo-Saxon rue\* makes for heavy company, and one shouldn't tax one's ideal reader. (Yes, you are still my ideal reader, ever since *Daybook*.)

\*N.B. Here, the archaic meaning – as in the non-sequitur "Norman compassion".

\*\*\*\*\*

White: J. Gardner, human being  
Black: Infernal Chess Program

1.	e2-e4	e7-e5	
2.	Ng1-f3	Nb8-c6	
3.	Bf1-c4	Bf8-c5	
4.	d2-d3	d7-d6	
5.	Nf3-g5	Ng8-h6	(begin repetition of position)
6.	Ng5-f3	Nh6-g8	
7.	Nf3-g5	Ng8-h6	
8.	Ng5-f3	Nh6-g8	

(Draw)

I cannot beat this program, which shall remain nameless. Draws are the best I can do. This one is the shortest of the series. I've told Kris Kincade that, should I ever beat this program, I will stop playing chess. The program is rated three points higher than Magnus Carlsen, the current world champion. I've been trying for ten months, and probably have played two hundred games. Once or twice, I thought 'today is the day' – but the program calculates pawns better than I do. For example, a recent end game found me with a king and four pawns, while the program had a king and three pawns -- first time ever that I was materially ahead, but the placement was slightly awkward; so, yes, of course, I lost.

Meanwhile, I think I am giving up on *AllthePigs*, the theatre company in London. They said they would read *Cathars*, but it has been ten weeks without a word. Oh, well. Perhaps I will send the play to two or three other troupes, then forget about it. Move on, as some like to say.

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Just checked e-mail to find a nice note from my mad master, Jim Disney. For some reason, I was thinking of neutron bombs at the same time. When the world was younger, Jim often called such as these 'the real estate bomb'. I suppose the idea was that the neutron bomb damaged collaterals such as thee and me (lives not worth pledging), while preserving someone else's sacred honor and real property. Life, liberty, and property – or rather, the pursuit of happiness – which, it is understood, cannot exist without the sacred right to property. In my case, this sacred right would extend to 450,000 hectares, if I could afford to pay Swiss mercenaries and/or pray for God to protect Commerce. Elbow room, you see, with my parcel abutting a national park where my privately-held company would mine, drill, and frack for reasons of national interest. John Muir, and coming generations, be damned.

Disney's an old Sierra Club environmentalist, from the days when that organization was deemed radical. Fifty years ago, the environmental degradation and deterioration were less than now. This is one reason why, although I might like to be young again, I would not want to be in my thirties, say, during this period of our human history.

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Frogs in a pot

No cataclysm or unpleasantness,  
But 'a major extinction event' is nigh;  
No paroxysm of expressiveness,  
As correctness of diction emits a sigh.

Perte de la bio-diversité...  
Et le réchauffement climatique...  
Parce-que la geo-perversité  
De la fou loi économique

Without a qualm  
We all stay calm  
As the planet attains its limits –  
I sing this song  
(You croak along)  
As the planet attains its limits.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is beginning to appear that this journal, or whatever you care to call it, may become something of a landfill of past scratches and scribbles. Perhaps even a repository (or is it "–tary"). And this puts me in mind of my old friend, Alan Adler. [See: *Hokusai's Great Wave, Annotated*, page 102, note 13.] Alan won't mind me telling this bit on him, because we all make spoonerisms and malapropisms sooner or later. To wit: A question was put to the members of the board: "Where would you like the organization to be, five years hence?" Alan's classic reply: "I would like to see the museum remain a suppository for local history."

Come to think: I received a letter from Alan two days ago, one that took six weeks to arrive. That's an unusually long crossing, but the letter arrived just before my father died, so Janjira and I had a bit of a laugh earlier in the evening. Alan wrote:

"*Lust of the Dead*. A Japanese zombie movie. A slightly new take on the genre. Instead of eating people, infected men gang-bang women. Leave it to the Japanese... usually you have to kill zombies by shooting them in the head. In this one, you crush their balls. Oh, well." Yes, Alan watches zombie movies, when he's not reading Gibbon or Tocqueville or Toynbee or... or... or... or painting. You get the idea.

\*\*\*\*\*

15 March - The Ides

Yesterday, when I informed Alan that *Lust of the Dead* is mentioned in passing herein, he responded with this short e-message:

"You forgot to mention *Zombie Strippers*. I was a bit confused in that. Was it just strippers who became Zombies or did it include exotic dancers? I'll have to wait for the sequel."

These are the questions, as we recall that Delmore Schwartz devoured comic books. Sorry, I am certain I meant to say *graphic novels* – a more dignified form. Whatever the terminology, it is far less objectionable than the progression that George Carlin pointed out twenty-five years ago: shell shock ==> battle fatigue ==> operational exhaustion ==> post-traumatic stress disorder, with each new term describing the same condition or set of symptoms: Militarized Government Issue Neurological Overload.

No good. This last classification might be too specific.

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16 March 2015

Thought I should make this note about my sequel to *Casablanca*, mainly because up to now I have given no thought, at all, to copyright and to who owns what. Never looked into it, until today. As it happens, in 1997 Warner paid money to Burnett and Alison. Who are they? The authors of *Everybody Comes to Rick's*. This unproduced play is the source for *Casablanca*, the screenplay of which was mostly worked upon by the Epstein twins and a fellow named Koch. Everyone's dead now, except the legal person, Warner.

Apparently, Burnett and Alison started a sequel to *Everybody Comes to Rick's*, but it came to only fifteen pages. Since the mid-1990s, I have heard rumors that a filmed sequel to *Casablanca* is pending, but I have no idea whether such has ever been made.

I started writing *The Blue Parrot* in 1991. I wrote maybe fifteen pages, as well. The idea was to complete it in time for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Casablanca* (1942). But, as so often happens in my life, I got sidetracked. As it happened, I put the script away for twenty-three years. Last year, I had a look at it. I decided to convert its digital format and keep it as a period curiosity. Soon thereafter, I thought it had possibilities, and I began to think seriously of returning to it, should I ever manage to finish rewriting *(The) Cathars*. This year, with *Cathars* behind me, I began reworking *The Blue Parrot*, while writing an alternative goof entitled *The Other Parrot*, which I finished a couple days ago. *The Blue Parrot* is still in-progress.

Probably, I cannot legally use the last scene of *Casablanca* as the opening scene in either of my sequels. But it seems a waste of time to approach Warner for permission, when I have no intention of trying to get the play produced – or even published, except in PDF. Hardly a threat to a monolithic corporate entity. Besides, *Parrot* is meant to be read, not played. So screw it.

\*\*\*\*\*

17 March : [E-pistle to an old friend]

First things first. Now, the second thing is that I almost fell asleep while we were talking last night, and I apologize for that. When I finished watching *Casablanca*, it was 11:30 p.m. and I was ready to hit the hay – but, I checked e-mail and found your proto-suicide note. Naturally, I asked myself whether this matter could wait 'til morning, or even until the day after tomorrow. But I knew that I would not sleep at all, if I did not call you before turning in. Anyway, it was good to hear your voice. Always is, actually.

When we discussed our fathers, you asked whether I had a good relationship with mine, at the end. I never know how to answer this kind of question. Part of me wants to say: "Golly-gee, yes! And thank you for asking, Mr. Cleaver." Or this classic: "Couldn't be better." But the real answer is that I simply do not think in those terms, and that's what makes a ready response difficult. Ready responses are false, period. My father is (not was, even now that he is dead) my father, and I am his son. "Relationship" doesn't enter into it. The simplest answer would be to say that he and I reached an understanding, and that we accepted each other. Also, the door was open, no matter what. My father was a complex fellow who, superficially, appeared to have reduced all the world down to eat, drink, and orgasm. More politely: food, clothing, and shelter. But that's not really the case. He kept a great deal inside, and one had to be paying attention to the little remarks, the asides and words in passing, in order to catch a glimpse of his thoughts. It was a curious combination, because he did not "open up" (in the therapeutic sense of people sitting around in a circle), nor did he purposefully conceal anything – he simply did not discuss certain topics very often or at length. Why, because what's done is done. No point in wallowing in it. Get on with it, whatever it is. That was my father's attitude. His real answers tended to be a single word. He would leave others to work out the implications.

Mood had much to do with it. Sometimes, oh, once every ten to fifteen years, he would feel like sitting down and jawing about things that matter. He was a good listener who asked pointed questions. He did not beat around the bush. I have no doubt that his directness was off-putting to some people. And, true, he did not care whether people found him off-putting. To him, either one talked straight or talked bullshit. There was nothing in between.

Well, I am tired again, this morning. This latest jag of sleeplessness is catching up with me. This is fitting, you might say: my initials are JAG.

I think you should keep a journal, [my friend]. I'm serious. Maybe also get yourself a dog to take for walks. It doesn't need to be some high-strung hunting hound, either. Otherwise...

How about those Broncos?

JG

P.S. It should be pointed out that "once every ten to fifteen years" between "real conversations" was the result of there always being so many miles between us. My father was in California, I was in Colorado... and then I have been here in Thailand these past twenty-five years. Neither Dad nor I is any good talking over the telephone. We both dislike the damn plastic things, although they are sometimes indispensable. We wrote letters back and forth, my father's rapid script always in graphite pencil; mine in black ink. When he was no longer able to write, I still sent the occasional monologue. I believe my brother, Glen, read my last letter to Dad about two weeks before he died. I have a snapshot of Dad listening to Glen read. Debi took the picture. My father is propped up, his head is turned to the side, and he looks to me every inch like the weathered but dignified Bog Man shown in an ancient issue of National Geographic. An old warrior, on his way out.

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19 March

My friend has written: "You're actually the only one outside of God I can tell these things to." Oh, man. How lonely is that? I say this because my friend has told me very little. Maybe he is testing the waters, because he apologized for weighing down my ears. I told him not to worry about my ears, because I hate funerals. This morning, my response sounds gruff; yet I said what I meant, as we may be going for broke. Perhaps the real matters on his mind will follow.

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20 March

*The Blue Parrot* is about one-third of the way, as of yesterday. So far, maybe 35 pages have been written, and I think everything is set up -- characters introduced, connections established, framework for conflict in place, etc. all in ten scenes. Now, it's a matter of letting the wheels turn and watching what happens to Rick, Louis, Sam, Carl, Sacha, Abdul, Ali, Heinze, Brücke, Marika, Ilena, Consuela and the rest. The screenplay of *CASABLANCA* is 135 pages. I am trying to keep *The Blue Parrot* down to about 100 pages, a self-imposed limit for many years. Also, Kris tells me that *En attendant Godot* (Editions Minuit, 1952) has arrived. Thank you Advanced Book Exchange (UK) and my friend's account. I hope to collect the play later today. Like everyone, I have heard about it all my life. Still, I have never read it -- only the synopsis at Wikipedia -- but as I refer to it in *The Other Parrot*, I had better find out just what I am talking about. (Yeah, James, good idea.) Samuel Becket must be smiling, somewhere. Apparently, many readers of the English translation of Becket's play think that Godot means 'God', but this is unlikely. Becket had a friend surnamed Godeau, and 'god' is 'dieu' in French, the language in which Becket wrote his play. Still, Becket has been fortunate in that so many Anglophone readers have made this assumption. It has made the play resonate. Note: Editions Minuit spells Becket as Beckett. They must be right.

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23 March

"Notre époque souffre de puritanisme intellectuel." Hmm. Saw this sentence in an on-line op-ed piece this morning. Not too far from Secular Puritanism, I think.

Meanwhile, in the space of ten weeks, *Charlie Hebdo* has become an object of disgust. The formerly struggling weekly magazine is suddenly awash in money -- millions of Euros -- since the bloodshed of 7 January. It is no surprise, then, that everyone's true colors are starting to show -- not that I worry about bourgeois bohemians. I'm certain their lawyers will sort things out for them, over the course of time.

\*\*\*\*\*

Damn it. Just finished re-watching Godard's "Le Mépris" and decided to check Wikipedia's entry, where I learned of Jacques Rozier, who made a documentary about Godard's film, "Le parti des choses". Then I went to Rozier's biography at Wikipedia and learned that in 2006 or 2008 he made a film entitled *The Blue Parrot*. Shit. Scheiße. Kaka. Mierda. Merde.

With any of my usual luck, Rozier's film will be a sequel to *Casablanca*. I cannot find any information about it, so far.

\*\*\*\*\*

24 March

Searched again for *Le Perroquet Bleu* / *The Blue Parrot* and found nothing except the names of two actors. It appears that Jacques Rozier did not complete the film, and now he is eighty-eight. There are few Manoel Oliveira's around, so probably Rozier is no longer working. All the same, completed or not, I would like to know his film's subject.

There is a jazz club in Marseille named *Le Perroquet Bleu* and also a resort in Marrakech. A number of other businesses are called *The Blue Parrot*.

BP: c'est le gare dernier (end of the line) pour L'Gardinier Riche. Je crois.

\*\*\*\*\*

25 March – from Eugène Green's *The Portuguese Nun*:

- I don't watch French films. They're for intellectuals.
- But our films are popular here in Portugal.
- Only in Lisbon, where there are intellectuals. No city is perfect.

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Speaking of doctrinaire intellectuals: when it comes to interpretation, Hegel's dialectic is more than a little flexible. Dialectic has been adapted to fit the prescriptions of Marx (communism), of Gentile (fascism), and of Kojève (capitalism).

Not that this should give us pause.

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26 March –

Burn after reading:

Puis va parler des sites d'initiation au Tibet: « C'est au Thibet que vivent, dit-on, les sages qui ont le pouvoir de prolonger la durée de la vie, et qui possèdent dans leurs archives, l'histoire de l'Atlantide et de la Lémurie, et aussi l'histoire de l'humanité future dont ils ont la vision par clairvoyance. C'est au Thibet qu'est la mystérieuse Cité de Shambhala, la ville des sages, c'est au Thibet qu'est le Roi du monde. »

This is the thing about the Internet: it's ever easier to encounter The Blue Ether. I got here from an article in Wikipedia about Salazar's opposition to Freemasonic Republicanism. Ah, wee mousie... click, click, click. Better make that Robert Burns after reading.

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Why the antagonism between these players? :

- 1) National Socialist Reich ==> Shamanism / Tantric Buddhism
- 2) Freemasonic Republic ==> Occultism / Cabbalism

Both antagonists aim(ed) at global dominion. [By the way: any conspiracy requires only two people who have a plan, so don't kid yourself. All politics are conspiratorial.] Both antagonists are on the right, and both are influenced by Theosophy. Their differences are slight. Both end in forms of the corporate state. The first is a system with a single party. The second is a system with a single party (business) that has two wings. The first is intolerant of those who oppose its agenda, and so is the second – but here, intolerance takes different forms. More on the different forms, by and by. For now, welcome to the Blue Ether:

*Traditionally*, both descend from sons of Noah. Huh? The first is ostensibly Aryan (i.e., the sons of Japheth). The second is ostensibly Semitic (i.e., the sons of Shem – which line runs to Abraham a.k.a. Abram a.k.a. Ibrim and a split between his women: Sarah [mother of the Jews] and Hagar [mother of the Arabs]. Here, you may be asking: Where are the traditional sons of Ham? Well folks, they be the slaves – them people of color, whether in Africa or India or East-is-East-and-West-is-elsewhere).

An aside on Freemasonry. In the mass media, there is much nonsense about this (hardly secret) discreet organization; and the closer one comes to American shores, the crazier it gets. By way of contrast, in France there is little question of the influence of Franc-Maçons – only without all the disinformation (crap) in respect of the sideshow at Roswell, New Mexico. It is understood that Freemasons are revolutionaries – in France: the regulars at *Café Procope*; in the United States: Washington, *et alia*; in Russia, Kerensky (but the Bolsheviks surprised nearly everyone) – revolutionaries who favor the republican form of government. As Plato is the model, republics have guardian classes, whether these call themselves the CFR, the UMP, or the IMF.

The Nazis put Freemasons to death. After the war, Freemasons executed those who collaborated with the Nazis (read: Vichy).

Ah, the freethinking revolutionaries. The Bill of Rights. The Rights of Man. Freedom, Equality, & Brotherhood. The Declaration of Human Rights. It sounds so entirely rational, which it is. Nonetheless, while rationality and logic overlap, they are not the same thing. The surrealist Max Ernst once observed that "to one insanity..." (World War I and its aftermath) "...we oppose another insanity." There's a kind of logic in that, but it's not necessarily rational. Logic begins with an assumption and extrapolates from it, come hell or high water. Rationality looks at the results of extrapolation and asks what value or utility they have. The logic of the Cold War led to a balance of terror and Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), whereas rationality turned back the ships carrying missiles to Cuba. Agreed, this is not a logical argument. Rather, it's a rational example.

Rationality can be distorted. It can be pushed to logical extremes and defeat itself. In a sense, rationality carries the germ of an incapacitating malady. Metaphorically speaking. (Okay, have

it your way: it carries sequences that code for disadvantageous gene expression and unfavorable mutations.)

Freedom, Equality, & Brotherhood? This points to individualism, of course. Individualism requires an identity. Identity can become politicized, and that leads to polarities that defeat Brotherhood, for starters. If one objects to the word 'brotherhood', then 'community' or 'society' or even 'sisterhood' will do. Have I abused the hypothetical syllogism? Probably. Has a point been made? Possibly.

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An aspect of our human condition:

"The so-called Semmelweis Reflex — a metaphor for a certain type of human behavior characterized by reflex-like rejection of new knowledge because it contradicts entrenched norms, beliefs or paradigms — is named after Semmelweis, whose perfectly reasonable hand-washing suggestions were ridiculed and rejected by his contemporaries.

"It has been seen as an irony that Semmelweis's critics considered themselves positivists, but even positivism suffers problems in the face of theories which seem magical or superstitious, such as the idea that 'corpse particles' might turn a person into a corpse, after a simple contact, with no causal mechanism being stipulated. They could not accept Semmelweis's ideas of minuscule and largely invisible amounts of decaying organic matter as a cause of every case of childbed fever — ideas which in the absence of a replicative biological mechanism, must have seemed no more chemically likely than homeopathy. To his contemporaries, Semmelweis seemed to be reverting to the speculative theories of earlier decades that were so repugnant to his positivist contemporaries."

-- Wikipedia (adapted, with inversion of paragraphs)

One may be rational, yet considered crazy. One might be logical, and yet quite mistaken.

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Know thyself. Right. "To thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." Etc. As for knowing anything about others, well ... How do I know whether I know? How do I know whether I do not know? How do I not know whether I know? How do I not know whether I do not know? These are all forms of the same question, although a logician may distinguish among them – a distinction without a difference, a merely rational person may say. In this instance, 'rational' probably means 'practical'.

It is one thing to play with conundrums in the classroom (Epistemology 101). It is yet another to face such conundrums in practical matters of domestic and foreign policy. In the real world, as in the classroom (for once), we are only as good as what we do or do not know.

Let's forget the classroom. Suppose we bring the world stage home, to our own neighborhood, where epistemological doubt or uncertainty can become concretely ugly – and where we cannot step out for an iced café latte at the end of the hour.

Exhibit A: internment camps, in the United States, during World War Twice (as Binh Rybacki likes to call the struggle). Such camps held the Nikkei – Americans of Japanese descent, born and bred in the USA. Therefore, theoretically, one of us. Of course, as is now widely known, the number of generations any Nikkei had been in the USA did not count for much during the war with Imperial Japan. Why?

Now, gentle reader, let us turn to the hundreds, possibly thousands of djihadists returning home after fighting in Syria and elsewhere. In France, those returning home are *Français de souche* – a term as inexact as *Américains de souche*, but referring to those born and bred in France. Other European countries are facing a similar problem. Their djihadists are returning home. And they are returning home in the wake of civil disturbances which killed citizens and neighbors.

Now, put yourself in France. Imagine yourself to be French. Do we know who these returnees are, really? Do we know what they will do next, really? Perhaps they will check their weapons at the door. Perhaps they will, upon returning home, subscribe to our enlightened principles of freedom, equality, and brotherhood. Perhaps they will live and let live. After all, they were born and bred here, in France. Still, one may be expecting more civil disturbances. More neighbors killed. More members of the family maimed – that sort of thing, and so one may be asking: What's the solution? What's the rational thing to do? Wait for them to strike? Deport them? Bar their re-entry? Put them in internment camps until this Middle East Thing blows over? Can't we all just get along?

It's a mess, all right – a mess of our own making. We shall see how our fine notions play out.

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re: A320 Andreas Lubitz, the co-pilot who took everyone with him: S'offrir son quart d'heure warholien en s'anéantissant. L'apothéose égocentrique et nihiliste qui résume toute l'époque. 3/2015 - A nihilist crashes a plane, killing others. Cf. 9/2001 - A believer crashes a plane, killing others. Perhaps there is a qualitative difference in these two events.

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Sunday morning, 29 March 2015

Nothing.

(To swipe a line from my great-uncle, Jasper Rich.)

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Then again, maybe something. Have been reading all morning: *Le cas Jean Marquès-Rivière*. It's too convoluted to explain how I ended up here, but it began with research to solve a problem in advancing the action in *The Blue Parrot*. One character, Colonel Brücke (SS), sent from Paris to investigate Strasser's death by gunshot at the airport, is about to have problems stemming from



the "Blood Protection Act" of 1935 and the 1941 police regulations identifying Jews. (Brücke's maternal grandmother is Jewish.) I am toying with the idea that there are Franc-Maçons in Casablanca, and that they are working with the underground. Anyway, Jean Marquès-Rivière, of course, was a former Freemason who collaborated with the Nazis in Paris. He was chief of the SSS – Secret Society Service (police) – as well as being the scriptwriter for *Forces Occultes*, an anti-Masonic film which, after the war, cost the director Paul Riche (real name, Jean Mamy) his life. Rivière was condemned to death *in absentia*, having fled to Switzerland. Later, he taught university in Franco's Spain. More to the point, he was a scholar of Sanskrit texts and of Tibetan Buddhism, in particular Tantric, in which the Nazis took an interest. Naturally, there is the authentic Tantric initiation and there is another version being administered by the Dalai Lama upon thousands of New Age spiritualists. The real initiation has to do with the less-than-public militant side of Buddhism and the cosmic war between the forces of Good and the forces of Evil. Probably, most Westerners would never suspect. Here is an excerpt:

"Depuis plus de trente-cinq ans, des centaines de milliers de personnes ont été 'initiales' dans le rituel du Kalachakra Tantra par le XIVe Dalai Lama. En public, on présente ces initiations comme étant une contribution, digne et exaltante, à la paix du monde et qui aidera à faire progresser la compassion pour tous les êtres vivants, le dialogue interreligieux, la tolérance entre les peuples et les races, la paix des cœurs, le développement de l'esprit et la béatitude pour le troisième millénaire. Mais celui qui étudiera le texte de plus près, s'apercevra bientôt qu'il ne s'agit pas là d'un texte prônant la paix, mais d'une agressive prophétie apocalyptique qui annonce un combat cosmique opposant les forces bouddhistes du Bien aux religions non-bouddhistes qui représentent le Mal."

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As an aside, it is interesting that both the Nazis and the Soviets sought to bring about a classless society, yet there was the nascent Führer Class and the upper echelon of the Communist Party. Meanwhile, French Republics declare "equality" ... and you get the idea. It does not matter what system is in place, an oligarchy is always on top.

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The entry above is funny because now, an hour later, having followed Jean Marquès-Rivière to Jean Coutrot (who offered his services to Vichy before committing suicide), I have come across this item from the *Pacte Synarchiste Revolutionnaire* :

IX. — Democratie veritable.

Nous reconnaissons et servons la Democratie veritable par une juste hierarchisation a base professionnelle.

L'ordre synarchique qui revele l'ordre reel et peut seul ainsi eviter les revoltes des gouvernes en fondant la justice des gouvernants, postule comme finalite de la democratie veritable, une societe sans classe mais hierarchisee et en definit les conditions pratiques.

[Right. Calling for an absolutely democratic society that is classless, yet hierarchical. Got it? No cognitive noise here, whatsoever. In any case, I may have an idea how to proceed with *The Blue Parrot*. It will require changing the plot and rewriting two or three scenes. Ah, Vichy – a rather complicated milieu. Before now, I never paid much attention to it.]

Online, there is little to nothing about Jean Coutrot in English. Jean Marquès-Rivière is still in print and there is considerable biographical information, mostly in French, some in English.

The differences between English and French versions of Wikipedia are often striking. Here are sample statements about 'synarchy' culled from English Wikipedia:

- 1) Saint-Yves envisioned a Federal Europe (as well as all the states it has integrated) with a corporatist government composed of three councils: one for academia, one for the judiciary, and one for commerce.
- 2) ...originated with the discovery of a document called *Pacte Synarchique* following the death of Jean Coutrot, a former member of Groupe X-Crise, on 15 May 1941. According to this document, a *Mouvement Synarchique d'Empire* had been founded in 1922, with the aim of abolishing parliamentarianism and replacing it with synarchy.
- 3) "...even before the war, [French industrial and banking interests] turned to Nazi Germany and looked to Hitler as the saviour of Europe from Communism. These people were as good fascists as any in Europe. Many of them had extensive and intimate business relations with German interests and were still dreaming of a new system of 'synarchy', which meant government of Europe on fascist principles by an international brotherhood of financiers and industrialists."
- 4) The Masonic lodge *Propaganda Due* (P2) was a textbook example of an attempt to establish a synarchy, as it united politicians, the Catholic Church, and the Mafia-controlled drug economy.
- 5) "no evidence for the existence of the *Mouvement Synarchiste d'Empire* has been found"
- 6) "false and originating in occult conspiracy theories"
- 7) "work of a paranoid imagination"

Does French Wikipedia also make statements 5, 6, and 7 above? No, it does not. Rather, French Wikipedia discusses synarchy in detail as government by technocrats, lists various organizations and their interrelationships, and names prominent players. French Wikipedia states that synarchy was Masonic and Martinist. (I suspect the second label, Martinist, means almost nothing to too many English speakers.) That makes sense. Why, because the Masonic form of government is republican in the Platonic sense, and technocrats would be the guardian class of the synarchy. My Swiss friend tells me that this informational gap cannot be helped. England, New Zealand, and Australia are islands. The United States and Canada are isolated.

And yet we are linked up like never before. Now there's a paradox for you.

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31 March

John Burgin, my Swiss friend, trained as a gunsmith 50+ years ago and since then has been making everything but, including knives and swords. Last year, he made two *boken* from hardwood and, for a time, he and I used them to beat each other black and blue. Practice, he

liked to call it. After it became clear that we might break each other's skulls, we decided to stop practicing. So, instead, he made two épées with very sharp points, but fitted with retractable buttons to keep us from running each other through. We have practiced with these several times without protective gear (as ever), until it became apparent that one of us would lose an eye by a deflected or parried blade. Ordering fencing masks from China seemed a good idea. These arrived last week. We wore them yesterday for the first time, and they are serviceable – good idea. A modicum of protection that allows us to lunge away: two old farts, trying to kill each other before taking an absinthe/calvados break in the late afternoon. We do this once per week, generally speaking, but we may schedule more frequent encounters. Why? Didn't I say we finish with absinthe or calvados?

John says that I am a madman, when a sword is in my hand. It's probably true. Yesterday's session began with John pursing his lips and addressing me effately as "Monsieur Gardinier". I naturally replied by sneering: "Your pock-marked mother abandoned you in a basket at the back door of a house of tolerance!" Insults, I find, get things moving faster than stretching exercises. At our ages, why waste time? A good insult leaps 50+ years of adulthood in half a second. Boys will be boys, etc. Of course, when I was ten years of age, say, the best insults went something like this: "Your mouth is like a drag-strip. Everyone's always burning rubber." Such mindlessly repeated insults were called 'chops'. Most of these were orally fixated, now that I think on it. Here's another moldy oldie: "If you promise not to tell anyone I have a wooden cock, I won't tell anybody that you have splinters on your tongue." The soul of wit, isn't it? The point, however, is that the playground at Madison Elementary was a mine field. Would you expect otherwise? Not in 1960, in Southern California. *Dichosa edad y siglos dichosos...*

Here's a coincidence: John once showed me a picture of himself with Hugo, a rhesus monkey at Sandoz Pharmaceuticals. John worked in a laboratory when the picture was taken around 1968 to 1970. When John presented the picture, I knew I had seen it before, either in a psychology textbook or the *National Geographic*. Not sure which, but it was during the time I was an undergraduate at CSU. Strange that I should remember the photograph and that, decades later, our paths should cross. Then again, perhaps it should be no surprise that I remember it, because I also recall looking at the picture a long time, forty-five years ago.

Textbook. It was in a textbook, but I am unsure whether on the lower left or the upper right hand side. Lower left, I think.

It's nearly eight o'clock. So, what's on for today? According to Grand-uncle Jasper, nothing. But we will see. It's early yet.

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Just spoke by telephone with my sister-in-law, Suzanne. She told me that 'the lawyer says' my father's ashes have gone missing. Lost. Misplaced. The crematorium cannot find them. I told Suzanne that I knew Dad was stubborn, but I never imagined he would take it this far. Suzanne replied that Glen has said the same thing.

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This morning, by e-mail, I received a suicide note. I called my friend. We talked. I said that I would call again tomorrow. Unfortunately, tomorrow is April Fools' Day, but this is not a laughing matter.

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1 April – All Fools' Day

Yesterday was a long day. Today will be a scorcher. After I worked in the garden (early-early, before the heat becomes intolerable), I called my depressed friend. He sounded much more himself, and another old friend was keeping him company. Our blasted digital toys made this possible, across continents and oceans. So, there's the proof: it is not that the toys are bad in and of themselves, but only in the way we put them to use. Anything can be abused. We, being human, usually find a way. (Sorry to preach. I have been reading Pascal's *Pensées*, which may have rubbed off a little.)

As to what I wrote yesterday about the laboratory monkey, I am now nearly dead certain that the photograph was on the upper right. And yes, it was a textbook, and not the *Geographic*. What an odd esprit be memory, say I, methinks, je dis.

Like I said, it's a day for natural-born fools. Maybe it's also a day for a long walk, no matter how hot the air. I'll think on it. Not sure I have the energy.

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2 April

It isn't solely thee or me or the Islamists who want to convert or rehabilitate the world. Here are the final items from the *Pacte Synarchiste*:

**Pour l'humanisme universel.**

597 — Ne pouvant accepter de nous désolidariser d'aucun être, nous voulons que l'actuelle révolution mondiale porte les peuples en un mouvement irrésistible,  
— au delà du marxisme orthodoxe matérialiste comme du faux libéralisme capitaliste,  
— vers une haute civilisation spirituelle marquée du sceau de l'humanisme universel.

598 — Cette volonté domine et inspire chaque point fondamental de notre Pacte synarchiste et nous ne cesserons d'aider jusqu'à l'accomplir à cette révélation sacrificielle de l'Homme sur tous les plans de la Vie et dans tous les peuples.

There it is. The goal? A high, spiritual civilization informed by universal humanism, for everyone, everywhere. Never mind the contradictions within humanism. Ah, well. As I said yesterday, today is our day.

Called my friend last night. At least one person is doing better. Hope it stays that way.

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Yesterday, I read around Cato the Younger, Julius Caesar, Pompey, Crassus, and the lot. Cato's incorruptibility is impressive, but he championed a republic with an aristocracy. Otherwise, what a crew. Caesar was a 'generous' dictator but ruthless. Pompey was less than ruthless, but extremely jealous and vain (he required three triumphs) and a bit of a plodder. Crassus had the good sense to die at the Battle of Carrhae, so one cannot fault him for that. But, he was a greedy bastard who enriched himself by speculating in public land. The triumvirate: nothing but egos and jealousy, and these assholes are the statues in our public places. Our heroes. No wonder Spartacus rose up.

The republic was corrupt. The triumvirate was corrupt. The empire was corrupt. Gee, maybe a synarchy run by technocrats might do better. Spiritual humanism. What an oxymoron. For many years, I thought any form of government would work, except for the flawed people who are in it. I no longer think this. It now appears to me that flawed people produce flawed systems, each system flawed in its own way. Anarchy, then? That cannot work, so long as we humans remain flawed.

It is difficult to avoid using illness as metaphor. I read Sontag's book many years ago. Even so, I cannot avoid saying that our systems only treat symptoms without going to the disease itself. Our forms are exterior, while our problems are interior. Everyone knows this, on one level or another. Yet our emphasis, our effort, is nearly always directed to the exterior, and government becomes a course of ineffectual treatments. Short-term planning, expedient programs, bread and circuses, or simply mob control, overtly or covertly. Control is good enough, one might suppose, for those on top. However, I cannot help seeing the top as anything but a pile of sand or gravel in some village, with all the dogs gathered around, clawing and biting. Why, to stand on top. Meanwhile, there are fields they could be running in, freely. But no, each mutt wants to stand alone atop the pile. A triumph of the first magnitude. Question: If they could, would dogs erect statues of themselves? I suppose they might – because, in certain respects, I do not see them as being very different from ourselves. And if this is so, then perhaps some dogs seek to implement a spiritual canine-ism, to the benefit of mutts everywhere.

I'm having one of those mornings, aren't I ... Better go work outside for a time, while I am still able to do something about weeds.

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Perhaps it's two hours later. Have come in from the garden and taken a bath. Today will be hot, but not as hot as yesterday. My shoulders are sore. A physician tells me that my left shoulder is 'frozen', so I have been working it back to a semblance of normalcy these past three months. It is doing better, but I do not expect to recover the range of motion I had formerly.

I feel increasingly cut-off from the natural world, so working in the garden helps. It seems to me that much of our anxiety and angst and anger stems from our being too removed from the natural world. At the same time, I understand that the word 'nature' can conjure different things, even different states, for different people. What do I mean?

While pottering in the garden, I thought of a piece about 'nature' written in 1999 (or so I recall), when I was teaching literary theory and had to explain 'logocentrism'. At the same time, I was

writing about Monpuyak Monastery and reading in Thai (more than I do now), so I began to think about 'dharmacentricism' – a term that has since become widespread in Thai academia. Here's the article:

### *"New Nature"*

The Thai magazine is called *Cheewa-Chit*, and it is concerned with healthful living and alternative lifestyles. I am thumbing absentmindedly through the latest issue when I see a photograph that snaps me to attention. There she is: bangs Cleopatra-straight, brow carefully pencilled, lids lined with mascara, lips painted a subdued red. Her right ring finger supports a glassy rock too big to be a real diamond. Here, on a divan in her plush apartment on Bangkok's Sukhumvit Road, in the heart of the downtown, sits movie star Siwaporn Jariyawech, her black dress trimmed at the cuffs and neck with striated fur the same color as her companion, a small, long-haired lap dog.

Siwaporn is calm and composed. She likes to stay home and keep house. She is no longer angry with anyone. She is now living close to nature. For this reason, the article is entitled *"A New Life Close To Nature."*

Close to nature? What is this: some kind of PR double-speak or willful disinclination to be bound by the definitions of logocentric discourse? To a Western ear, such an assertion would be ludicrous. To a Thai ear, Siwaporn's assertion makes perfect sense. Further, it is one clue to a huge gulf in understanding between peoples of different cultures speaking different languages.

Westerners associate "nature" with mountains, oceans, deserts, forests and other green leafy geo-stuff. So do Thais. However, their word for nature is (in a post-modernly theoretical sense) over-determined to the degree their Theravadan Buddhist culture is dharma-centric.

The Thai word for *nature* is dharma-chaht (ธรรมชาตีย์), a compound. The second member of this pair, chaht (ชาติ), has several applications and generally means "life"; but more specifically it refers to a present incarnation in the cycle of rebirths. Dharma (ธรรม), of course, is the set of precepts taught by the Buddha; namely, the Four Noble Truths (อริยสัจ Ariya-sacca or "Aryan truth") and the Eight-fold Path (มรรค / มรรค ๘ องค์).

Central to the Eight-fold Path are detachment and right-mindfulness. Anger comes of attachment, and so is far from right-mindfulness. To be far from right-mindfulness is to be far from the *dharma* or precepts to which even a movie star should adhere in this present life or *chaht*. For a Theravadan, dharma is the right, true, and natural way to live. So, when Siwaporn

says she is happy to stay home and is no longer angry, she is saying that she is closer to right-mindfulness and is therefore living "close to nature." Her fur-trimmed neckline and the pooch in her lap appear to have nothing to do with it.

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"สิวพร จริยาเวช : ชีวิตใหม่ ใกล้ชิดธรรมชาติ" ชีวจิต ปีที่ 2 ฉบับที่ 32 1 ก.พ. 2543  
( กรุงเทพฯ : อมรินทร์พริ้นท์ติ้งแอนด์พับลิชชิ่ง ) หน้า 16-17.

"Siwaporn Jariyawech: A New Life Close To Nature" Cheewa-Chit 2.32, 1 February 2000  
(Bangkok: Amarind Printing & Publishing), pp. 16-17.

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Voilà – but I see the year in question is 2000, not 1999. In another two years, books on postmodernism became available in Lampang, of all places.

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3 April

Manoel est mort. Merde, alors.

Selon *Le Monde*:

Avec la mort de Manoel de Oliveira, le cinéma perd son doyen

Un art auquel il donna, sans surprise, la plus belle et secrète des définitions : « *Une saturation de signes magnifiques baignant dans la lumière de leur absence d'explication.* »

dans *Libération*:

Le prolifique réalisateur s'est éteint jeudi à 106 ans. Il laisse une filmographie vertigineuse, empreinte de splendides méditations.

*C'est ça.*

At 2 a.m., mouth as dry as a desert, I came downstairs for water. I drank two bottles. Then, I looked on-line. Oliveira had died, and *Le Monde* and *Libération* had long articles about him. The view of both is that Oliveira stood alone: a Jesuit-trained 20th century modernist from the 19th century who knew how to dissect the globalized world, bringing to bear a wide range of historical and literary sources married to a surrealist sensibility, while opposing the Hollywood and New Wave camps. A charming autocrat, according to colleagues; to critics, a man whose productivity embarrassed those who are one-third his age. He was a philosopher, a moralist, a social critic, an intellectual, and a simple man, all at once. He was always positive, at bottom, even when focusing upon humanity's darker shadows. He possessed a poetic spirit and sharp-eyed detachment. Final verdict: cinema has lost its doyen.

In France, the ex-patriate American filmmaker Eugène Green produces work influenced by Oliveira. I have seen two of Green's films, *Le Pont des Arts* and *The Portuguese Nun*. To me, it appears that Green has Oliveira's visual sensibility, but lacks Oliveira's broad background. Don't we all? Green also has Oliveira's mordant humor:

Maitre d'hotel: I don't watch French films. They're for intellectuals.

Actress/guest: But our films do very well here in Portugal.

Maitre d'hotel: Only in Lisbon, which has many intellectuals. No city is perfect.

That last line is from subtitles in English. The Portuguese soundtrack and the French subtitles say something more subtly biting: *Every city has its inconveniences*.

Here is a painting I completed several years ago. It is entitled *Café Oliveira*:

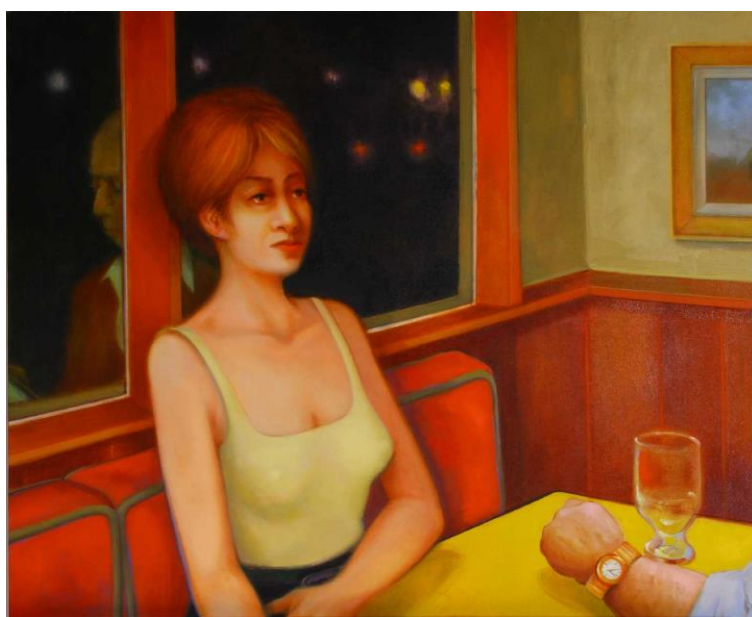


After I saw Oliveira's *Belle Toujours*, and then Jose Luis Guerin's *Dans la Ville de Sylvie*, I decided to do a series of paintings set in cafés. I had been drawing people in cafés for some time, but I had painted nothing because the Impressionists, the Expressionists, and later Picasso, had covered the ground thoroughly. Oliveira and Guerin, however, saw cafés in the same way that I do... and so. This is *Café Guerin*:





Here are *Corner Table* and *Next Customer* :





Three years after I painted these, I returned to the subject, only this time painting couples sitting at tables, ignoring each other, completely engrossed in their smartphones. I did not complete anything that I started. The subject – malady – is too obviously with us. But then, I was winding down, and by the end of 2013, I stopped painting altogether – just another case of burnout. Not a loss. Nothing like losing the next film by Manoel de Oliveira.

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While we are in the vicinity, it is time to say that I think Hockney's thesis (Steadman's, really) is correct: the history of the renaissance is the history of optics. *Opticks*, I mean. Vermeer, surely used mirrors and lenses. More, I am beginning to think that even Velasquez used optics. Take a look at how King Philip's head rests upon so many of the collars Velasquez painted, and the lack of focus where head touches fabric. I think Velasquez made use of mannequins, to paint the king's pose and attire. Hence the summary brushwork of rich fabric and brocade. The heads were added later. One of Velasquez's earliest portraits of the king is ten heads high, while the latter portraits are the conventional seven or eight. (Optics improved over time, and experiments over time led to new techniques and applications.) This same sort of distortion can be found in Caravaggio. Of course, Caravaggio, Vermeer, and Velasquez could handle their brushes and understood their medium. There is no question of that. But optics most certainly changed the way they saw and how they painted.

Interesting. These days, the use of mechanical aides is described as the cutting edge intersection of art and technology. When I was coming up, such practices were viewed as cheating, unless one was a photorealist who openly admitted to the use of projection (in which case the work that was produced remained second tier). Unlike members of the secretive Guild of St. Luke, photorealists could be, at least, credited for honesty in respect of their practices. I have no doubt that this is a matter of perspective (excuse the expression), and that there is a logical distinction – or rationalization – to be made between secrecy and outright deception. Especially given that it is incumbent upon us humans to explain to ourselves this age of reiteration, proliferation, fakery, and distortion. Improvements upon nature, all. For after all, these things are like war: if we did not like doing them, they would not exist.

This may be something of a leap, given the foregoing, but the so-called 'trans-valuation of values' now appears to me as simple self-justification, if not self-delusion. At the same time, *one must adapt to changing circumstances* – that's the paradigm – or be lumped with remnant Bonapartists who daub on Sundays. Something like that.

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From one extreme to the other, and holding that in mind, look at 'the evolution' of films about artists. Previously, painters were depicted as other-worldly geniuses who are in need of a bath. These days, they are inarticulate, belching and farting beastie boys. Both are tedious company. I do not believe Korda's *Rembrandt* (1936) any more than Matton's *Rembrandt* (1999), much less Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* (2014). Somehow, I suspect that Schama's BBC series, *The Power of Art*, with its pop-sensibility (god forbid), is closer to the real Rembrandt and the real Turner. Of course, an ideal reader might suppose that Simon Schama's interpretation makes better sense to me, given my temperament.

Northrup Frye, were he still among us, might see this change as the cyclical movement from romantic mode to ironic. Next up: comedic, in the Shakespearean sense. You know: not sitcoms, but *All's Well That Ends Well* – the community comes together as misapprehensions are resolved. If only we can find a way to convince ourselves that things will be all right, in the end.

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As we have name-dropped Frye, this may be the place to say that I see fantasy films and video games with Manga-eyed heroes and heroines as an attempt to return to heroic mode. We are forced to effect the return through cartoons and computer generated imagery, because the real world is short of Round Table Knights, swordsmen like Cyrano, and sheriffs with white hats. For a long time now, the best we can do is conjure the anti-hero of ironic mode.

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Sarcasm is an aspect of ironic mode, and I am weary of sarcasm. Unfortunately, in the American mass media, sarcasm is a dominant characteristic. It absolutely rules among stand-up comedians. Sorry: *performance artists*. Too bad. It short-circuits thought. It's nothing but attitude, and the same attitude, over and over. It's boring. Sarcasm is much too easy. Worse, it's sophomoric. In

the end, it is also trite. Since Leonard and Rickles, the form has become extremely threadbare. That is, old hat. I mean, it's like *so* 15 nano-seconds ago. See what I mean?

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Just received word. My old friend's serious depression may have saved the spouse's life. Concerned, the spouse made arrangements to return home a day earlier than scheduled. That is, as soon as possible. Like the old song: what a difference a day makes – because the day after returning, the spouse's appendix burst. That little event might easily have happened over the Pacific Ocean. These days, appendectomies may be routine surgery, but a ruptured appendix still turns quickly to sepsis.

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Until today, draws are the best I have done. After nearly a year of trying, I have at last beaten the chess program that for too long remained the only one I could not beat. I feel like dancing in the end-zone. Why? L'homme vs. The Machine, of course. It is rated higher than the current world champ, so likely the only way to win is to play a line that has never been played, or a line that has not been analyzed to death. Nonetheless, the moves that the program made look logical to me – so beating it makes me well pleased. After 31 moves, the game was mine for the taking, but it took another 20 moves to put the game away. Why, because I could not think straight after so many defeats. I was wetting my pants, when I saw the game was in the bag.

Is it time to retire? I remember telling Kris Kincade that *if ever* I should beat this son-of-a-bitch program, I would stop playing chess altogether. Still, I beat it playing white. Maybe I should quit after a win with black. Hmm. I'll think on it. Anyway, here are the moves:

WHITE: L'homme, moi

BLACK: The Infernal Machine

- |            |         |                    |               |
|------------|---------|--------------------|---------------|
| 1. e2-e4   | c7-c5   | 17. Nb1-d2         | b7-b6         |
| 2. Ng1-f3  | e7-e6   | 18. Nf3-g5         | h7-h6         |
| 3. Bf1-c4  | d7-d5   | 19. Qh5xf7+        | Kg8-h8        |
| 4. e4xd5   | e6xd5   | 20. Nd2-f3         | h6xg5         |
| 5. Bc4-b5+ | Bc8-d7  | 21. Nf3xg5         | Qb2-c2        |
| 6. Bb5xd7+ | Nb8xd7  | 22. Qf7-h5+        | Kh8-g8        |
| 7. d2-d4   | c5xd4   | 23. Qh5-f7+        | Kg8-h8        |
| 8. Nf3xd4  | Bf8-b4+ | 24. Ra1-e1         | Nc6-e5        |
| 9. c2-c3   | Bb4-c5  | 25. Qf7-h5+        | Kh8-g8        |
| 10. Bc1-e3 | Ng8-e7  | 26. Re1xe5         | Rd8-f8        |
| 11. O-O    | O-O     | 27. Re5-e2         | Qc2-d3        |
| 12. Nd4-f3 | Qd8-b6  | 28. Re2-e3         | Qd3-f5        |
| 13. Be3xc5 | Nd7xc5  | 29. Re3-f3         | Qf5xg5        |
| 14. Qd1-d4 | Ne7-c6  | 30. Rf3xf8+        | Ra8xf8        |
| 15. Qd4xd5 | Rf8-d8  | <b>31. Qh5xg5*</b> | <b>Rf8-e8</b> |
| 16. Qd5-h5 | Qb6xb2  | 32. Rf1-d1         | Kg8-f7        |

33. h2-h3	Re8-e6	43. Kg1-f2	Nc5-d3+
34. c3-c4	Re6-e8	44. Kf2-f3	Nd3xf4
35. Rd1-d5	Re8-e6	45. Kf3xf4	Re1-f1+
36. Rd5-f5+	Kf7-g8	46. Kf4-g3	Rf1-f8
37. Qg5-d8+	Kg8-h7	47. g5-g6	a5-a4
38. Rf5-h5+	Kh7-g6	48. Qc7-e7	Rf8-f6
39. g2-g4	Kg6-f7	49. Qe7-e8+	Rf6-f8
40. Qd8-c7+	Kf7-g8	50. Rh5-h8+	Kg8xh8
41. g4-g5	a7-a5	51. Qe8xf8#	(1-0)
42. f2-f4	Re6-e1+		

\* Actually, the game is over at this point. If the bastard had been a gentleman, it would have resigned. However, the damned program will not even accept an offer to draw a game, as I have seen many times. Recently, *it* and I played to a draw after 140 moves. The game was over after 35 moves, with a king and a rook remaining for each side, but the son-of-a-bitch insisted upon the 50-move rule and then made meaningless 'advances' to continue play, *twice*, until I trapped and forced the exchange of rooks. The game was exceedingly ugly.

I love chess, although I am a mediocre player. The term for any player like me is *woodpusher*. Well, what should one expect; I am not a student of the game, and I play too much by intuition. I'm not sure, but it may be time to put the game aside, for I doubt I can effect a cleaner win than this one, above – and I surely cannot win with the black pieces. The program plays pawns much, much better than I do. Usually, the program beats me after converting a pawn.

There is a recent draw that I should have won, because I am ahead by a pawn quite late in the game. I have played through the end-game several times, and a draw is the best I can do – that, or the machine wins after conversion. Having played, probably, three hundred games, this past year, against the infernal machine, it is the only contest in which I have been ahead in pawns. Otherwise, I am a pawn down, always, and very often more.

\*\*\*\*\*

Janjira just returned home to say that her father may have had another stroke. He has not been right since yesterday, when there was a change in his medication as prescribed by a physician who tried to alleviate three weeks of spasmodic symptoms. Problems began last night, when Dad was more or less in outer space. This morning, Janjira took him off the medicine, and her father did somewhat better within a few hours, but... he's not right. Something has happened. We are waiting to see how he fares when the medication has passed through his body. Tomorrow morning should tell the story.

There is a lunar eclipse tonight. I have never before seen one, because there is always cloud-cover. Tonight, however, the sky is clear. In the distance, I can hear someone playing the nae

(๙๙ / ๙๙) nearly as well as Nikko played it, so many years ago. I always stopped to listen when Nikko played in a procession or at a funeral. His playing reminded me of John Coltrane.

\*\*\*\*\*

5 April

Janjira's father is better this morning.

\*\*\*\*\*

6 April

Last night I met Millie Young and Lorenza Macco at the latter's guest house, where we drank wine and talked until past midnight. Millie teaches animation at Mahidol University. Joining us was a female mahout, Jo, who lived eighteen years in Japan, where she met her Thai husband, also a mahout. Jo came with their son, a polite young man of twelve or thirteen. Jo's husband stayed home with the elephants, in Ayuthaya. Janjira also stayed home, as she had not slept well the previous night.

We discussed many things: an exhibition of Millie's work at a gallery in Bangkok; elephants in the wild; the man-made flood in the Central plains; the social environment and, specifically, the lack of civility nearly everywhere. Millie described how prevalent the word *fuck* has become in the UK. Lorenza, who speaks five languages, said that something similar has happened in Italy, where *cazzo* (slang for penis) is used the same way: *What the cazzo do you want?*

What do I want? Civility, I suppose, but perhaps not for the usual reasons. For many years I have thought that it is a mistake for profanity to become acceptable in daily parlance – not because profanity is dirty, but because offensive language is a safety valve, and it loses shock value when employed gratuitously. When every other word is *cazzo*, no other means remain for expressing displeasure – that is, getting people's attention – excepting to point a gun and shoot.

\*\*\*\*\*

Another massacre.

Qui veut faire l'ange fait la bête, qui veut faire la providence fait l'enfer.

\*\*\*\*\*

7 April

Spoke with Glen over the telephone. Our father's ashes have been 'found'. Of course, there is no way to know whether these ashes, if reconstituted, would bark and wag their tail.

\*\*\*\*\*

A school of fish. A school of whales. A pride of lions. A paddling of ducks. A gaggle of geese. A flight of geese. A murder of crows. A nide of pheasants. A charm of finches. An exaltation of larks. A charge of rhinoceri. A leap of leopards. A curiosity of monkeys. A clowder of cats.

A swarm of bees. A column of ants. A parliament of owls. A rafter of turkeys. A pack of dogs. A pack of wolves. A flock of sheep. A herd of goats. A herd of buffalo. A siege of...? That's it. I cannot remember any collective nouns for animals, more than that. Then think of all the terms Thomas Hardy used when describing landscape. Lost, now.\*

[\*Maybe not. I looked on-line and found the list that appears in Appendix A.]

\*\*\*\*\*

"La vérité scientifique est générée par l'accumulation de résultats au cours du temps, *pas par l'éclat ou le bruit d'une étude isolée*".

Wouldn't that be nice, were it always the case.

\*\*\*\*\*

8 April – headline in *Libération*:

### **Qui peut décider de mon sexe, de ma dignité, de ma mort ?**

Not nature, surely. Can't have that. So the debate is between the public and private sectors. It is interesting that three distinctly different questions have been lumped together, so that the framing of the question makes resolution something of an omnibus bill. What a muddle.

Meanwhile, Jean Le Pen. What a piece of work. He has stated that the battle, fight, or struggle is against democracy – and then holds up Pétain as the height from which we have fallen. Voilà : we should be collaborating with the Third Reich. The right has compelling arguments about the collapse of schools and the disintegration of the family, but this fellow is beyond the pale. He has followed the logic of his position well into irrationality.

The left is no better. They too have followed the logic of their position well into irrationality. Families, schools, and nature itself are being shredded, and the left act as if these things are for the commonweal.

Unbounded, we become unbalanced. Unbalanced, we remain unbounded. That, I think, is the vicious circle.

And the centrists? Consumers of bread and circuses, targets of amnesia and advocates of denial. Not without cause, they are battered by both sides. Why, because business as usual ain't workin'. To paraphrase Yeats, *the center does not hold*.

And yet, the middle must be the fulcrum, although we are too far gone, the damage is done, and it looks irreparable.

Thanks to you, ideal reader, it is easier for me to say what I mean: last night, I watched Oliveira's *Mon Cas*. This remark is not a non-sequitur.

\*\*\*\*\*

From the annotations to a famous chess game:

"There seems to be a deep-rooted prejudice against draws, and complaints are frequently heard about uninspired draws in modern master competition ... Chess literature abounds in draws far more exciting than many a decisive outcome."

'Decisive outcome' is the giveaway. By contrast, a draw is indecisive, enigmatic, equivocal, and ambiguous, which makes it intolerable.

The logic of the situation. The logical move. The logical result. Now, the logical outcome may be a draw, so why would a lover of logic (as chess players tend to pride themselves) have a deep-rooted prejudice against one – unless logic goes hand-in-hand with the intolerance of ambiguity.

\*\*\*\*\*

10 April –

Here is Orwell-speak published in yesterday's *Bangkok Post*. The context is a public observance in remembrance of the bloody clash at Khok Wua intersection. The speaker is the current Prime Minister, who is self-appointed: "It is better to avoid what may turn into a contentious issue. I am not prohibiting people, but asking them."

The PM stated that if anyone wished to mourn, they should do so individually, in the privacy of their own home – and avoid public gatherings, which are under close watch by the police.

\*\*\*\*\*

Owing to when days fall this month, the annual Songkrand festival and water war will begin today, unofficially, two days earlier than the calendar stipulates. Today is Friday, after all, and it is hot outside. Officially, the last day is the fifteenth, this coming Wednesday.

\*\*\*\*\*

Meanwhile, snobbery is still with us. Or is it inverse snobbery, in reverse? Perhaps an ideal reader can make a determination based upon three examples:

1) When I was growing up, anyone who said anything in French was 'putting on airs'. Writers who employed French terms or phrases were hoity-toity, period(e). One of my English instructors even maintained that we students should confine ourselves to a solidly Anglo-Saxon *vocabulaire*. You get the *idée*. Le point: depending upon the source, 40-60 percent of English comes from French.

2) A month ago, I spoke with an Englishman who has lived and worked in France and is able to speak French well. He is not alone. At least two other Englishmen of my acquaintance are fluent in French. Since all three live and work here in Lampang, I asked the first whether he ever practices French with the other two. He replied no, that to do so would be snobbish.

3) The official web-site of the French Academy states: "En France il pleut beaucoup d'anglicismes. On les refuse, ou on les utilise par paresse ou snobisme..." Hmm. To translate: In France, it rains anglicized words. We refuse them, or use them from laziness or snobbery...



There it is: English speakers who use French are pretentious snobs, and French speakers who use English are lazy snobs.

Call a native English speaker a *snob* (sounds solidly Saxon, doesn't it?) for using French, and you have just used French. Meanwhile, call a French speaker a *snob* for using English, and you have just used English. How so? The origin of *snob* is unknown. I like to think that *snob* is a loan word from Interlingua.

\*\*\*\*\*

11 April

J. H. Blackburne, a.k.a. The Black Death, was a 19th century chess master from England, to wit:

"It is estimated that Blackburne played 100,000 games in his career, more than any other professional chess-player. However, he still had time to marry twice and, with his second wife, Mary Fox, he had a son, Julius."

Hmm. Something about this statement makes me laugh, I'm not quite sure why. Maybe because Blackburne had not enough time, or failed to fianchetto his bishop, in the first match.

\*\*\*\*\*

Why is Gabriel-Kane Day-Lewis being heavily publicized? He has famous parents, fine – so do others. Wikipedia says that he has aspirations of being a rapper. Fine, although I am unsure that the world needs another. He is twenty years of age. What has he done? Of course, this may be a stupid question, in the celebrity culture that is our mass media. No surprise that he has a bio, already, on-line. He is the new royalty. And the import? As Beaumarchais might point out, were he alive today, the kid has accomplished little else except to be born. He hasn't even gone Bieber-viral. Yet, "Gabe Day" is being fêted – which fact recalls us to those conditions that preceded the French Revolution. Now, let's see what the economy does. Qu'ils mangent de la brioche? You get my drift.

\*\*\*\*\*

Whatever any future generation has, that is what they will know; and, because it is all they will know, it will be their standard – if for no other reason than by default.

"The media have fucked up everybody." – Miles Davis, *Miles in Paris* (1989) at 00:23:00.

\*\*\*\*\*

14 April

John von Neumann once stated that "chess is not a game, it's a calculation." I agree with von Neumann that the game of chess is not a game. Not exactly. And, of course, the game of chess requires calculation, as do quantum mechanics, paying US taxes, and juggling three lovers at the same time. With that in mind, here is an annotation from Lautier vs. Vaganian (2004 Moscow Aeroflot Open, Round 9): "Vaganian is one of the last chess artists. Watch his magic at work in his dazzling game against the French GM Joel Lautier". Magic? In the realm of international

chess, there is a consensus among the logicians of the game that Rafael Vaganian is an artist. I suppose he might also be a magician, as Kasparov was often called.

Another interesting aside from Chessmaster 10: "Here [Jennifer Shahade] introduces a spirited novelty in the opening and gains an advantage, then goes astray. Yet she won thanks to the clock when Black overstepped on time in a superior position. Who says there is no luck in chess?"

You, my ideal reader, must be wondering what point I am trying to make. Here it is: all these statements and characterizations are true, so far as they reach. Chess entails calculation, artistry, luck, and perhaps even magic, should we overlook intuition. The truth value of von Neumann's statement requires a reduction of factors.

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18 April

"The most important thing I discovered a few days after turning 65 is that I can't waste any more time doing things I don't want to do."

- Jep Gambardella, *La Grande Bellezza*

\*\*\*\*\*

Sent an e-mail to AllthePigs in London:

Dear Ami Stidolph –

I see from the calendar that *Piano Man* is slated for this evening at the Weston in Leicester, and that the play will continue touring through May. Break a leg, and all other appropriate wishes. This message is a follow-up. Last January, you stated an intention to read *Cathars* – thank you, again – and also that it might take several weeks to do that. I surely understand why, and I must say that, judging from on-line information and videos, *Piano Man* looks quite compelling. I would like to see it. Unfortunately, I am nowhere near UK and cannot afford airfare.

As to *Cathars*, I hope to hear from you in June or July. Between now and then, let me say that AllthePigs might adapt the play to suit themselves; such would be fine with me. Nor is there any need to give thought to paying the author. I am serious about this. Your making arrangement for my internment in Poet's Corner will be gratitude enough.

My best to you and the company.  
JG

P.S. Although I probably meant to type 'interment'. I have been away too long, here in SE Asia.

\*\*\*\*\*

Received a hyperlink to my father's on-line obituary. He is survived by five people unknown to me, and he apparently had no sons or daughters. He lived in a town he was never in, had a dog he never kept, liked to watch birds and will be sorely missed. The photograph was he, of course, but his birthdate missed by seven years: 20 November 1931. Dad was born in 1924, but his third wife probably did not know that. Anyway, my sister mentioned that half of Dad's ashes are in an urn, sitting on a bookshelf in her office at home. Probably in June, Debi will take those ashes to Wyoming, and scatter them at the old Leonard Morris Ranch. The other half, presumably, are feeding fish off the coast of California, as I type. Bon voyage.

\*\*\*\*\*

19 April

I think it is *Manhattan* wherein Woody Allen's character imagines God defending himself: "I do a lot of terrible things, but I can still make one of these." And what is 'one of these'? A woman, of course. Why, because it's Woody Allen in the 1970s.

Forty years later, I think Mr. Allen is correct. Without women, this world would be intolerable. Yet my point of view has changed, because I no longer see women as humanity's saving grace – not when they insist upon being as stupid as men. But then, many observers think that stupidity is on the rise across the board. Which includes thee and me, wouldn't it? Well, we are fortunate to have such enlightened observers – or would be, if only their sagacity could rub off.

Ah, Irish whisky. It gives one the certitude of having said something worth jotting down. I don't know about you, gentle reader, but I'll take an illusion every time. So let it stand.

\*\*\*\*\*

20 April

It's too hot here, this time of year. Have been filling birdbaths three times per day. Otherwise, I have been writing lately to a retired engineer. He is an atheist of long standing and an articulate porte-parole for chaos theory. Yesterday, we were discussing the so-called Rockette Effect and touching upon the conversations of birds and dogs.

Seem to have returned to *The Blue Parrot*, after a month's distractions. Also, for the first time in a long time, I have been thinking about painting. As if any of this matters, just that I cannot seem to put anything aside for good. Still, I intend to build a Pompeii oven in Janjira's garden, the idea being to bake bread and such. Purchased some bricks yesterday. For those who know better, this behavior is called "easel avoidance syndrome". Alternatively, blue parrot fever.

\*\*\*\*\*

Just spoke with Janjira via telephone. Why, because when I finished writing the entry above, I noticed the quietness of the house and began to wonder what Janjira was doing. So, I went to find her. I looked out the windows, then realized that today is Monday and that she departed for

the hospital an hour ago. I called her to make sure I finally had the facts straight: "I did open the gate for you to exit the car port, didn't I?" She laughed, of course, because I always do that – and this morning was no exception. Now, if I could just find my socks...

\*\*\*\*\*

I have seen fifteen of Manoel de Oliveira's films at least twice, except *The Cannibals* (did not make it even once through this one), but including *Abraham's Valley*, which comes in around four hours. Today, it being too hot to do anything else, I saw *A Divina Comédia* for the fourth time. A couple days ago, also a rather too hot day, I watched *The Uncertainty Principle* for the fourth time and *The Party* for the third. A long movie day, but this is the hottest time of the year, it was Saturday, and Janjira was napping under a fan because she had not slept at all the night before. Why, because it's too damned hot. So, you see.

Now, for all that, the film I still like best is the first one I ever saw from Oliveira: *Belle Toujours*, his homage to Luis Buñuel. And, in this moment, I am wondering what Oliveira really thinks about anything. After all, toward the end of *A Divina Comédia*, the 'devil's advocate' rationalist gets a blast of pigeon shit flush on his forehead – and, however annoying his character, he has all the best arguments. At least one French critic sees Oliveira's films as "une œuvre toujours sauvée du pourrissement mélancolique et de la tentation du crépuscule par un perpétuel ressourcement de sa croyance en les souveraines puissances de l'illusion et de l'imaginaire". Imagination, surely. Meanwhile, Oliveira's 'illusions' are concerned with real human problems – although, yes, if one is Buddhist, such problems are also illusory, ultimately.

Methinks Oliveira was probably as Catholic as Buñuel, who was 'more Catholic than the Pope'.

\*\*\*\*\*

I am interrupting Oliveira's *Francisca* to say that, on the whole, we males of the species are right assholes. No, I do not exclude myself from this assessment. Nor do I like what is happening with women – which is, to be become more like men. It is exasperating. We are always out of balance. We never get it right. Machismo. The Peacock Virtues. What a bane. That said... back to Oliveira.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have seen *Francisca* three times. I like it, but it does not speak to me. Not really. I do not think that Oliveira is a great filmmaker so much as a unique filmmaker. For me, his real value lies in my being confronted with a sensibility that is largely 19th century. Oliveira is a holdover from an age that had other concerns – and, by contrast, our age at times looks pretty puny.

And what else have I accomplished today, besides watching two films? Nothing besides filling bird baths, driving into town on errands, and making a splint for a banana tree that slumped mid-stalk under the weight of meager, unripe fruit. Nothing more. It's hot – too hot for this old fart.

The sun is setting.

\*\*\*\*\*

22 April

The new caregiver for Janjira's father is leaving after three days. She is a recent graduate of Matayom (high school) and she received word yesterday that she has won an academic scholarship. She has told Janjira that she will find a replacement. This is likely to be true, because she herself is a replacement for a young caregiver who stayed ten days, who in turn replaced another young woman who stayed three weeks. When this last one took her leave, because her parents called her home to be married, Janjira learned that ALL of her father's caregivers have been coming from the same hill-tribe village for the past several years – at least until the scholarship winner, who comes from a neighboring village. The Karen have formed a network, without telling anyone until now. Each young woman who has come into the house has been aged 15 to 20. All have been capable, conscientious, guileless, and polite. Apparently our house has a good reputation among the Karen, because the longest wait for a replacement was three weeks, owing to heavy rains and impassable roads. On two occasions, replacements came within two days, which is no mean feat, because the villages are remote and have no electricity for communications. Janjira says that she would like to visit the villages, as would I, but we have discussed the matter and decided not to do that. Outsiders like us would just fuck them up. "Eco-touring" to such villages has already done damage enough, so these two villages are very careful. They send young caregivers to provinces throughout the north, and they have worked out their own system of rotation without explaining much to outsiders. If one employs them, one lets them do what they do, when they do it. And they do it very well.

The one who stayed ten days had to return home for a funeral -- her grandfather. The one who stayed longest was in the house for three years. Another stayed eighteen months. Another ten months. So, one never knows.

I am beginning to see this arrangement as a new model for employer-employee (formerly master-slave) relations. It may be long overdue. The one thing that this system makes quite clear is that we need them, and they need us. No one should forget that.

I suspect that the durations of stay will become shorter and shorter, because the job is difficult and tedious. The Karen are saving money and making use of Thai schools. What's interesting is that even the educated among them (one in a neighboring province completed a Masters) want to return home, marry, and start a family. They miss their mountains.

\*\*\*\*\*

Thanks to *Wikipedia*, I just learned of this fellow:

**Sultan Khan** was a chess player who won the British Championship three times and, in various tournaments, placed among the top ten players of the world. His career lasted five years, as long as Paul Morphy's short career. Sultan Khan gave up chess upon his return to British India and to his accustomed role of manservant. So yes, there's a story in that. The American psychologist and grandmaster Reuben Fine explains:

"*Sultan* was not the term of status that we supposed it to be; it was merely a first name. In fact, Sultan Khan was actually a kind of serf on the estate of a maharajah when his chess genius was discovered. He spoke English poorly, and kept score in Hindustani. It was said that he could not even read the European notations.

"After [the 1933 Folkestone Olympiad] the American team was invited to the home of Sultan Khan's master in London. When we were ushered in, we were greeted by the maharajah with the remark, 'It is an honor for you to be here; ordinarily I converse only with my greyhounds.' [...] He presented us with a four-page printed biography telling of his life and exploits; so far as we could see, his greatest achievement was to have been born a maharajah. In the meantime Sultan Khan, who was our real entrée to his presence, was treated as a servant by the maharajah (which in fact he was, according to Indian law), and we found ourselves in the peculiar position of being waited on at table by a chess grand master."

Not quite. Although Sultan Khan was one of the world's top players in the early 1930s, the World Chess Federation (FIDE) never awarded him the title of Grandmaster, or International Master.

\*\*\*\*\*

24 April

My friend Howard Goldman, from time to time, sends the occasional "free thought for the day" my way from the Freedom from Religion Foundation. My response for this morning reads: I see that Shakesp(e)ar(e) is also among the atheists listed. This triggered a memory, something I heard when I was in my teens: a theory that Shakespeare had worked on the KJV. The idea was that he had recast the wording of the translation committee and, in doing so, left a clue indicating that fact at Psalm 46.

The KJV was begun in 1604. It was completed and printed in 1611, when Shakespeare was 46 years old. The 46<sup>th</sup> word from the beginning of the psalm is 'shake' and the 46<sup>th</sup> word from the end of the psalm is 'spear' – not that this proves anything, because the date of Shakespeare's birth is no longer as certain as once it was. Wikipedia states that he died at age 52, whereas I seem to recall an older age of 56. Whatever. I tend toward the Oxfordian view, anyway.

Here we go:

**46** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup>Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;

<sup>3</sup>Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains SHAKE with the swelling thereof.

[...]

<sup>9</sup>He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the SPEAR in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.

<sup>10</sup> Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Selah, as they used to say.

\*\*\*\*\*

25 April

"What could a satirist do with Auschwitz?" – Edward Burra, painter

Burra's question applies to writers, filmmakers, philosophers... everyone, really; and it recalls me to a remark I read many years ago. Who made the observation? I do not remember, but it was to the effect that World War I and WWII killed millions, yes, but the greatest loss was *meaning*.

\*\*\*\*\*

Context is everything: a common hemoglobin mutation which causes sickle cell anemia also confers a natural defense against malaria.

\*\*\*\*\*

27 April

This afternoon, I talked with K. about Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Penitent*. This book is having an effect upon K's thought, insofar as he identifies with the complaints and condemnations of "Joseph Shapiro" *vis-à-vis* the modern world. I asked K. about "Shapiro's" mind-set, and how it might differ from the mind-set of an Islamist. Singer writes: "Actually, a total solution would void the greatest gift that God has bestowed upon mankind - free choice." Of course it would, you may be thinking, because a 'total solution' is totalitarian.

We also discussed an episode of Inspector Morse ("*Second Time Around*") that reminds me of Greek tragedy. In tragedy, a fatal flaw (vanity, greed, jealousy, suspicion, procrastination, and the like) leads to a protagonist's undoing or utter destruction; and yet, there is another possibility that I have been considering ever since I read Doris Lessing's portrait of her father some twenty-five years ago. I can only paraphrase what she wrote: "It is time to confront something difficult: how a man's good qualities can work against him." Yes, exactly. For me, this is where tragedy really lies – not in a fatal flaw, but rather in a virtue or good intention that brings ruin once the grinding gears of perverse circumstance begin to turn. It is unjust. Therein lies not only its dramatic power, but its truthfulness.

From an interview with Doris Lessing: 'I knew what I was going to do with *The Good Terrorist*. [...] I had the central character, because I know several people [who have] this mixture of very maternal caring, worrying about whales and seals and the environment, but at the same time saying, "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs," and who can contemplate killing large numbers of people without a moment's bother.'

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28 April

[Dear Muse] –

Sotheby's, Christie's, and Colnaghi's handle all sorts of sales: estates, fine art, on and on. If you write an inquiry letter that explains your intention and what you have to sell, they will know how best to market your collection: for example, whether to sell items individually or everything as a single lot. Apparently, some collectors invest in such things – that is, some will buy an entire series, or even all the work of a single painter. It's often speculation, although there are surely cases of collectors who appreciate their acquisitions. Besides, in your case, a collector may be pleased to know that the acquisition could be helping someone, into the bargain.\* Win-win, I think they call it.

You have the slide presentations that I prepared for you. Should you not want to send those, then I can send JPGs of the paintings and drawings to you, so that you can forward them to the auction house. As a ballpark figure, the highest price paid for one of my paintings was \$10,000 about twelve years ago. The lowest price was about \$600, maybe thirty years ago. Good luck. Let me know what you want to do, and how I might help.

\*Her idea is to sell the paintings and drawings from our collaboration in 2012 and then send the proceeds to Nepal, where there has been a devastating earthquake.

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P.S. Sorry to bother you with this. In case you *do* make an inquiry, *and* should the auction house want to know something about your painter, just say that he has been many years in northern Thailand (don't be too specific) and that he has done nothing of any consequence – and, finally, that he is reclusive. Moreover, when you modeled for him, a horse-drawn coach collected you, while you were required to wear a blindfold coming and going from the studio, which, each and every time, was in a different location. That should do it.

["Cryptic Contemplation". I just noticed the title in the lower right of my monitor – background music from the Inspector Morse series. It began to play as I pasted in the P.S., above. Hmm.]

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29 April

In response to my remarks about I.B. Singer, above, a friend sent this short message:

"What is this fascination you have with hypocrites and other contradictory tendencies? Biochemical imbalances I suspect."

Surely my friend was suggesting that I have the imbalance, but I replied: "The more time passes, the more I suspect that the universe has a biochemical imbalance."

Metaphor, perhaps. A form of dualism, of course. But I have at times remarked elsewhere that this world seems to turn on contradiction(s). And there was a time when this was said as a joke.



Another friend wrote to say: "Good terrorists don't exist. To spread terror you must kill innocents. Does terrorism work? Yes, unfortunately. It worked in Algeria against the French. I'll have to read the "Penitent" to see what you mean. I presume K is from the book by Kafka." I replied: "I think that the 'good' is ironic in Lessing's title. And 'K' would like to be Kafka, perhaps, but he is a friend who writes, here in Lampang." I would be interested to know what you think of Singer's book. I'm not entirely sure what to make of it.

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"The French tradition of free expression is too full of contradictions to fully embrace. Even *Charlie Hebdo* once fired a writer for not retracting an anti-Semitic column. Apparently he crossed some red line that was in place for one minority but not another."

-- Garry Trudeau, at the Polk Awards

And Trudeau's right: satire punches up, not down.

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30 April

A book arrived from UK (Wales) last night, one on mathematics that I ordered from ABE via the Internet. It is a replacement volume, because my first copy disappeared when I came to Thailand in 1990. The book, *Mathematics for the Million*, was published in 1942 in accordance with 'war economy standards' and it is in surprisingly good condition. It is the first and only mathematics text I have ever seen that mentions Pythagoras, Protestants, Fitzgerald's translation of Omar's *Rubaiyat*, and Adolf Hitler. The author is Lancelot Hogben, who also wrote *Nature and Nurture*, and a volume entitled *Genetic Principles in Medicine and Social Sciences*. Apparently, these books are in a series called Primers for the Age of Plenty. This series was published during that time when Britannia was fighting for her life – something akin to the optimism of copyist monks in a dark age.

For the sake of giving you, my ideal reader, some idea of Hogben's book, I have decided to type out the first page or so – then, bring it up to date; why, because little has changed since the event that Hogben here describes:

There is a story about Diderot, the Encyclopaedist and materialist, a foremost figure in the intellectual awakening which immediately preceded the French Revolution. Diderot was staying at the Russian court, where his elegant flippancy was entertaining the nobility. Fearing that the faith of her retainers was at stake, the Tsarista commissioned Euler, the most distinguished mathematician of the time, to debate with Diderot in public. Diderot was informed that a mathematician had established a proof of the existence of God. He was summoned to court without being told the name of his opponent. Before the assembled court, Euler accosted him with the following pronouncement, which was uttered with due gravity:

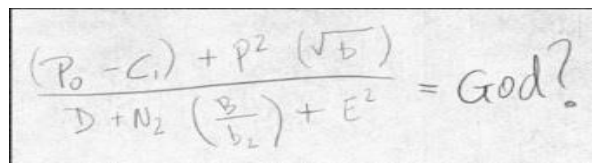
"  $(a + b^n) / n == x$ , donc Dieu existe répondez ! "

Algebra was Arabic to Diderot. Unfortunately he did not realize that was the trouble. Had he realized that algebra is just a language in which we describe the *sizes* of things in contrast to the ordinary language which we use to describe the *sorts* of things in the world, he would have asked Euler to translate the first half of the sentence into French. Translated freely into English, it may

be rendered: "A number  $x$  can be got by first adding a number  $a$  to a number  $b$  multiplied by itself a certain number of times, and then dividing the whole by the number of  $b$ 's multiplied together. So God exists after all. What have you got to say now?" If Diderot had asked Euler to illustrate the first part of his remark for the clearer understanding of the Russian court, Euler might have replied that  $x$  is 3 and  $n$  is 4, and so forth. Euler's troubles would have begun when the court wanted to know how the second part of the sentence follows from the first part. Like many of us, Diderot had stage-fright when confronted with a sentence in size language. He left the court abruptly, confined himself to his chambers, demanded a safe conduct, and promptly returned to France.

Though he could not know it, Diderot had the last laugh before the court of history. The clericalism which Diderot fought was overthrown, and though it has never lacked the services of an eminent mathematician, the supernaturalism which Euler defended has been in retreat ever since.

Not quite ... and, end of excerpt. Now it is time to paste in an image (the Photo Shop inversion of chalk on a blackboard) culled from an article published in 2009:



$$\frac{(P_0 - C_1) + P^2 (\sqrt{b})}{D + N_2 \left(\frac{B}{b_2}\right) + E^2} = \text{God?}$$

Here, we might follow Hogben and say that, insofar as this equation is about *sizes* rather than *things*, the statement is utter nonsense. Who says logicians cannot be crazed? Not that Euler was crazy. After all, he wrote at least two papers that are still read today: "On every integer as a sum of four squares" and "On the use of  $e$  to represent 2.178".

Then again, matters are not always so clean and neat. When we speak of "specificity" in evolutionary biology, we use mathematics to describe the *size* of a probability or improbability that some sort of *thing* might come into existence by chance.

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During his tenure as Chair for Social Biology at the London School of Economics (funded by the Rockefeller Foundation), Lancelot Hogben unleashed a relentless attack on the British eugenics movement, at its apex in the 1920s and 1930s. In contrast to eugenicists, who commonly drew a strict line between heredity and environment, Hogben emphasized the 'interdependence of nature and nurture' – his position being the first time that gene-environment interaction was used to undermine statistical attempts to partition the contributions of nature and nurture, as well as the eugenic implications drawn from those statistics.

"No society is safe in the hands of its clever people."

– Lancelot Hogben, *Mathematics for the Million*

And here are two more examples (time capsules, really):

"In the hands of Arabic mathematicians like Omar Khayyam, the main features of a language of calculation took shape. We still call it by the Arabic name, algebra. We owe algebra and the pattern of modern European poetry to a non-Aryan people who would be excluded from the vote in the Union of South Africa. Along the trade routes, this new arithmetic is brought into Europe by Jewish scholars from the Moorish universities of Spain and by Gentile merchants trading with the Levant, some of them patronized by nobles whose outlook had been unintentionally broadened by the Crusades."

"An eminent Scottish mathematician gave a very sound piece of advice for the lack of which many people have been discouraged unnecessarily. 'Every mathematical book that is worth anything,' said Chrystal, 'must be read backwards and forwards ... the advice of a French mathematician, *allez en avant et la foi vous viendra*'."

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1 May

A friend wrote to say that the story about Euler and Diderot is balderdash. I replied:

The story may well be apocryphal, and I will take your word as to the presumed source. This sort of thing often happens, especially in periods of revision such as ours. For example, it is now said that Marie Antoinette never remarked "Let them eat cake." Instead, it is a misrepresentation by the revolutionaries of what she did say; either that, or it was said by someone else, a Countess Somebody. [...] Anyway, in the first case, Antoinette is said to have remarked "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche" – this, with reference to bread laws. Supposedly, when bakers sold out the lower-priced baguettes, they were then required to sell brioche at the same low price. But who knows?

Another of my friends wrote to say that mathematical 'proofs' for the existence of God were common in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And, apparently they still happen, as in the image from 2009. My interest in these is not by way of their being any sort of proof at all, but rather by way of the limitations of mathematics used to describe aspects of reality and/or metaphysics. I say "and/or" because some think that ultimate reality is metaphysical. I suppose this goes off into illusion and delusion... I do not know. (Actually, I am thinking about discussing this conundrum with myself in writing: namely, that everything I 'know' comes from others who purport to know, whether they are wearing a white coat or a rain coat.) It may be the case, too, that any proof in support of [your] objections [to mathematical probability in regard to specificity] is simply too complicated for discussion by the laity via e-mail. It may be 'over our heads', in which case we would be in the position of medieval parishioners.

On the other hand, so much of current debate seems to entail what my grandfather called "chicken-egg" questions and "half-full/half-empty" arguments. Two different people look at the same phenomena and arrive at different (sometimes opposite) inferences or conclusions.

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2 May

The by now venerable<sup>1</sup> *Rolling Stone Magazine* came up in conversation last night. I had not seen the magazine in a long time, so I had a look this morning to see whether Matt Taibbi has a

new article posted. Instead, I clicked on a link for something like "10 Bad Actors Who Got Big Parts" or some such. In an instant, I was faced with dozens of similar lists, all having to do with various aspects of mass media culture. As I scrolled down, I noticed the emphasis upon fantasy, sci-fi, 'super heroes', grimacing faces, reptilian masks, physical confrontation, bloodiness, etc. Yes, I know: I am sorely out of touch. Soon, I began to consider the totality of images as either a description of the American psyche or the mindset of *Rolling Stone's* current editors – or both. Well, what should anyone expect, after thirty-five years of video games? Then, to think that this is how we have been programming ourselves. We be digital Goths, one might think, with our sensibilities utterly stunted. But, somehow, I don't quite think so. I just wonder, what the hell is all this crap?

<sup>1</sup> "Old whores, ugly buildings, and politicians all get respectable if they last long enough." - Noah Cross<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> That is, John Huston speaking the lines of Robert Towne in Roman Polanski's *Chinatown*.

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Time for *Lujon* (*Slow Hot Wind*). Henry Mancini. Lushly romantic, tropical sounding music (in 1960, anyway) from TV's *Mr. Lucky*. Got it? Hold that in mind, as I tell you that yesterday the bananas in our garden were pale green, turning to yellow. Ripening, then. "Looking good." But not today. Today they are as black and shriveled as feces from the Great Pyramid. How has that happened? Since yesterday, there has been a slow, hot, death-dealing wind. Then again, when it comes to bananas, we're not so lucky. Something always gets to them before Janjira and I do. If not the wind, then it's the birds. Strange that, when I saw the black bananas, *Lujon* should run through my head, because, as I must have mentioned in an earlier journal, this music was heard in my father's house, along with Harry James, Count Basie's big band, and Ralph Marterie and His Marlboro Men. Hmm. This last group did music for *Peter Gunn*, I think, and both *Gunn* and *Lucky* were Blake Edwards's productions. Then Edwards went on to the *Pink Panther* series – and this is how one's mind runs when bananas turn black overnight. Like being in different times and places at once and the same time.

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3 May

No need for an alarm clock. I have นกน้ำ (nohk-gwak) outside my window. They are nesting nearby and, at 5:45, when the sun begins to assert itself, these two water hens raise a racket like a sore-throated machine. The din lasts two minutes at most, and then the birds are as shy as church mice. Sometimes they appear atop the garden wall, just before sundown and after the other birds have finished bathing. There they will be, trying to lower their long legs into the shallow clay baths.

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The new care-giver for Janjira's father has arrived. She is our first returnee, so she is not really new. Late last year, she took a higher paying job in Chiang Mai, but she apparently did not like it. Last week, she received news through the village signal corps about our most recent girl, the one who received a scholarship and departed after three days, so she called Janjira to say that she would like to return. This happened the day after the scholarship winner's replacement called to say that she would not be able to come – why, because she is needed in the family's rice fields. When the replacement cancelled, Janjira was not worried, because now she better understands how the Karen do things. And, the very next day, our returnee called. The returnee's name is nearly pronounced like "tree" in English, but the meaning has no branches or leaves. I do not know whether her name is Karen or Thai, and it is possible that the name is the same in both languages – in which case it would come from Pali, and signify "three" or "third".

[There's a coucal pacing back and forth along the wall, just outside my window.]

As I have already said, for several years our caregivers have come from two remote villages of Karen. In all that time, there has been no need for résumés, references, advertisements, agencies, fees, contracts, insurance, bonds, or lawsuits. The arrangements are person-to-person. On both sides, there is a natural give and take. An accommodation. And, of course, trust.

I am unsure how much longer such interactions as this will be allowed to continue in this world.

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4 May

We are in a heat wave.

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5 May

Irony. *Le féminisme contre la femme*. Not that I am a fan of Marine Le Pen, whose homage at the monument remembering Jeanne d'Arc was interrupted by Femen with their shouts and Nazi salutes. But oh, well done!

It's been some days since this media 'event', and what the French call the *mediacratie* (I like this playful pun: media-democracy-mediocrity) are still disseminating videos, pix, and op-ed pieces. Especially videos and pix, because it's a circus.

Meanwhile, *le féminisme*, with its masculine article, reminds me of the old neologism *womyn*, with its Y chromosome. Personally, I'm waiting for Femen to cut a rap-folk-soul album and go on tour.

"On remarquera que les manifestations de ces drôles de dames culottées ne sont jamais choisies au hasard et on attend encore que ces hystériques du monokini viennent s'inviter à la Fête de l'Huma, au congrès du Parti socialiste, ou perturber le prêche d'un imam à l'heure de la grande prière. On a le féminisme « sélectif » chez les Femen." – Anne-Sophie Désir

One might well think that, but I couldn't possibly comment. – Francis Urquhart, *House of Cards*

What a contradictory clash of symbols and circumstances. Besides Femen giving the Nazi salute to someone who canned her own father for his denial of the Holocaust, Ms. Le Pen is the only woman who leads a political party in France, where Joan of Arc was the only woman (known to me) ever to have led an army. Femen cries out for the liberation of women, and they support free speech (except Le Pen's, apparently) – and they oppose that rampant mental disorder known as islamophobia on the view that Islam, of course, universally advances the cause of women.

As for Le Pen: unless St. Joan (the former heretic) intervenes, Marine and her father (who is now *persona non grata* in the political party that he founded) will undo each other, very likely.

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6 May

Robert Menard, the far-right mayor of Béziers, is being called upon by Hollande's ruling socialist government to explain his policy of "ficher les écoliers musulmans" – keeping files on Muslim schoolchildren, apparently, unless the verb *ficher* means chucking them out of the school system. No, I'm not reading the article to find out. Nor am I reading the article about a rally in Poland in which the protestors dressed themselves like Crusaders of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

What a world. Any questions?

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Okay, I had a look. Menard has been doing something like profiling – keeping track of Muslim students in the schools of Béziers – which such practice has been prohibited by the national law since 6 January 1978, at Article 8:

*« Il est interdit de collecter ou de traiter des données à caractère personnel qui font apparaître, directement ou indirectement, les origines raciales ou ethniques, les opinions politiques, philosophiques ou religieuses ou l'appartenance syndicale des personnes, ou qui sont relatives à la santé ou à la vie sexuelle de celles-ci. »*

Of course, this is precisely what the police do in tracking suspected jihadists. So, in a sense, we are already living *Minority Report* – and not without reason; which is, unfortunately, the catch. We are damned if we do, and damned if we do not. A dilemma, an intractable problem, a lose-lose situation, a mirthless cosmic joke.

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9 May

1)

Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the word (logos)..."

Cf. logos as pharmakon (medicine/poison) in *Phaedo*.

==> In the beginning was the "medicine/poison" dualism.

Cf. Book of Job – earliest book of OT; "a not entirely loving portrait of God."

2)

Materialism  
matter/energy – assumed interchangeability  
Consciousness  
property of matter? where does it reside?

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11 May

...de l'histoire, de la géographie, de la littérature, du dessin, de la musique, de la philosophie, des langues étrangères, ...de tout ce qui élargit notre horizon, de tout ce qui embellit notre vie, de tout ce qui nous distingue des animaux, ...de tout ce qui, transmis par nos aînés à leurs cadets, était transmis par ceux-ci à leurs enfants...

Un ordinateur et un téléphone portables, une calculette, un vocabulaire français de cinq cents mots, quelques notions de verlan et de globish, le mépris de la culture, le culte de la réussite, la religion de l'argent, c'est plus qu'il n'en faut pour faire son chemin dans l'existence et pour que nous ressemblions entièrement et définitivement à des porcs.

Les insensés ! Ils n'ont pas compris ou ils ont oublié la formule sublime du Cyrano de Bergerac : « *Non, non, c'est bien plus beau lorsque c'est inutile !* »

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13 May – From an e-pistle to Tim Fasching:

"I have been sitting here, staring at the monitor, trying to decide whether to tell you of one of the /phenomena/ I have experienced. All right, and without elaboration (although details certainly make this little event all the more striking): Within a second of seeing Janjira for the first time, there was a voice in my right ear, the only such voice I have ever heard: neither male nor female, certainly not very loud, but clear as a bell. It said: "She's the one." When I heard this, I thought I was finally stark, raving nuts. Two years later, we were married. This is the simplified version. For want of better terms, one may begin to wonder about 'coincidence' and 'synchronicity' and 'precognition' – any of which constitute one of the several gateways leading off into the blue ether. Argh."

And today is Wednesday. Last year, if I recall rightly, today was a Thursday, and I had returned to Colorado for a funeral and to bury Dennis's ashes. I am still not accommodated to the idea that he is gone.

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14 May

Yesterday, I over-did it. This morning, I am spent. It's too damned hot. At least I am not hooked up to an IV in hospital, which happened to me thirty-five years ago, during the dog days

of August. This time I am stiff and sore, but not cramping from head to toe. I worked outside, yesterday, in the morning and again in the afternoon – all told, maybe six hours. I was topping our many henna trees and pruning limbs from the mangoes, besides transplanting several tall-stalked, broad-leafed plants that I cannot name (even in Thai) and which grow to be twelve-feet in height. Of course, I stopped to drink water every hour or so.

The heat is deceptive. While you are working, you sweat, yes, but you are not soaked with sweat, because your clothing is drying at the same time. Your sweat is evaporating. It is when you stop working, and go indoors for ten minutes, that your clothing becomes drenched. Then, you can be as wet as if someone had turned a hose on you.

When I quit for the day, sometime between 16.30 and 17.00 o'clock, I put down a large of bottle of Asahi, two bottles of Salvator, four bottles of water (two mixed with electrolytes), and began a second large bottle of Asahi, all in the space of half an hour. Then, I more or less drank water continuously, maybe one bottle every half hour, until I turned in at the unusual hour of 20.00. The fan was on full throttle, but it was so hot I could not sleep – or at least I do not recall waking at any point.

This morning, I dragged and pushed myself up from the ที่นอน (tee-non\*) like an old dog on a concrete porch, found my way to the refrigerator, removed two bottles of water (one mixed with electrolytes), and poured myself a cup of coffee. Only after drinking all three did I urinate for the first time since the previous morning. And not much. Like I said, it's too damned hot.

I feel like a charred matchstick, dry as a bone. Of course, the word these days is 'dehydrated' – I first heard it from a Marathon runner in the 1970s – which word tells us next to nothing, because we are given to say we are 'dehydrated' when we are not really thirsty but would like a swallow of something. This morning, 'dehydration' may be an accurate description, but the word itself will not do.

Sun is heating up. Again.

\* A general term meaning the place where one lies down – a mat on the floor, a futon, a mattress. In this instance, a mat on the floor, soon followed by a futon on a kind of shelf, in turn followed by a mat on a wide wooden platform-bench. No real equivalent in English. Anyway, three uncomfortable resting places that were too damned hot.

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Headline:

104 églises profanées en 4 mois : et nos gouvernants parlent d'islamophobie ?

Du 1 janvier au 15 février, 45 églises ont été visitées par des infidèles indéliçats. Une par jour.

According to the author, nothing has been done, owing to *Christianophobie*. I am unsure whether the simultaneous desecration of synagogues (temples) also falls under this taxon.

But there's more:

There is a new mental disorder in the world: *gérontophobie*. As you might suspect, sufferers of this wide-spread malady are *gérontophobes* who tend to be a number of decades younger than



the old farts who want sex with them. Woody Allen somewhere remarked that, yeah, science can put a man on the moon – but when a 70 year old man is alone with a 19 year old girl, nothing happens.

Well, now. I'll bet that line has been expunged. Secular Puritans might view it as an appropriate application of *the right to forget*. Perhaps.

Discrimination comes in many forms, apparently. I suspect this new disorder is the brainchild of a long-retired lawyer who has a much younger legal assistant.

Disclaimer: Please note that the sex and/or gender for either the lawyer and/or the legal assistant remains unspecified.

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16 May

Now and again there are images that tell us something about newspapers. One of the following images comes from *Le Monde*, the other comes from *Le Figaro*. Guess which one is which...



In both images, Sarkozy is on the left, while Hollande is on the right – so that's not much help.

Yes, you are correct. Well done – but, can we tell without reference to whomever is pointing?

Sure we can.

Time to read the signs. For example: the one on the bottom is from *Le Figaro* – why, because the conservative newspaper has deeper pockets and can afford to print a larger image that employs red ink. Notice, too, that the pointer is backed by an orderly crowd. Now then, see any flag in the top image? That's *Le Monde* for you, with its low-key patriotism and liberal emphasis upon the EU. Finally, you may have noticed that the one politician is forcibly pointing a finger, whereas the other politician is making an open-handed gesture.

Oh, yes... we nearly forgot: both politicians are modest men. See a gold or red power necktie? So, there you have it. Elementary, my dear Ideal Reader.

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It's raining. Heitor Villa-Lobos is conducting *The Symphony of the Air* (with chorus) in his cantata, *O Floresta do Amazonas*, with soprano Bidu Sayão in her last recording. This music was intended for *Green Mansions*, which movie even the magic of an Audrey Hepburn could not save. Villa-Lobos composed the score for the film, but he was displeased with how his music was being used. Hence, this cantata – an adaptation. When it came time to perform and record it, he called Sayão, his old collaborator, out of retirement. If I recall rightly, Villa-Lobos died shortly after making this recording (1958-59). Sayão lived another 40 years or more, and died in her nineties somewhere in Maine – a long way from her native Brazil. Brasil, if you please.

The weather today has been as moody and changeable as this music. Hot and dry, then muggy, then hard winds from opposite directions, then thunder and rain. Then absolute stillness. Then a gentle rain. When the electricity returned to our house, I thought this music would be a good fit. It is a file downloaded from You Tube. My vinyl version is in a box in Colorado.

The things we miss.

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When I was young, my favorite composers were Bartok, Copland, Mozart, Satie, and Schuman. No, not Robert Schumann. William Schuman. Also, Stravinsky, Villa-Lobos, and Vivaldi. Of course, I listened to many other composers from different periods, as well; but, probably, these are the composers to whom I listened most often. These days, I still listen to Schuman and Villa-Lobos, and sometimes Bartok, but I rarely listen to Satie (except for *Socrate*) and nearly never Copland (I prefer Samuel Barber). I still do excursions into Monteverdi and Corelli and Rorem and Hindemith and Cage and Scarlatti and Rodrigo and Ginastera and Bach and Prokofiev and Puccini and Gorecki and... However, when I am on automatic pilot, more often than not, I go straight to the choice between Poulenc and Ravel.

Perhaps you are thinking: Where are Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelsohn, Mussorgsky, Schubert, Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, Wagner, and... Each of these composers has written something I

like, perhaps even two things, but on the whole, for one reason or another, they do not speak to me. Not really. As for Handel, Haydn, Lully, Telemann, and... Well, I suppose one might say they are diverting. And then there are dozens of composers, curiosities mostly, who hold interest for a short time and are then forgotten.

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17 May

An old friend has written to ask where I encountered the term *gerontophobie*, and whether it might not be spelled *gerontophobia*. I probably should have drank at least one cup of coffee before replying:

"The term is from the French press; but surely it can be Anglicised or Americanized. The meaning is being expanded, apparently -- and this explains my interest, because the expansion might be viewed as the inevitable change that comes to all languages, or it might be seen as part of a systematic 'transvaluation of values' which targets language. True, I find it a useful tool, whenever my advances are shunned by someone 45 years younger than myself: obviously, many young women have a mental disorder or have yet to find freedom from the culturally imposed bounds of Bourgeois Nature.

"Actually, if an eighty year old cellist wants to marry an 18 year old student,\* more power to both of them; but why make up some bogus term with which to hit the student over the head should she decline the proposal? I am weary of reservations and disagreements being labeled as 'phobias'. It is becoming absurd and so widespread [that] I am beginning to think there is a [politically] motivated fear-of-fear that might be labeled as *phobophobia*."

\* Pablo Casals, of course. Turning it around, we might have mentioned Georgia O'Keefe and Juan Hamilton, instead. Or even King David in Jerusalem, in case one is biblically inclined.

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This, in reply to my brother:

"You probably have not heard the term *Secular Puritanism* because I am the one who coined it, maybe five years ago. Lately, in the French press, I have seen the phrase "les bon pensants" which I take to mean *good-thinking* or *politically correct*. If so, this would be an aspect of Secular Puritanism -- however, I think the attitude (mindset, really) can happen on either end of the political spectrum. Bullshit is bullshit, wherever the source. Just now, the prevailing wind (lexical nonsense, in this case) comes from the left, that's all."

Circuses go 'round. I should have added that, no doubt, the right will soon have its turn.

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18 May

This morning I learned that the temperature hit 44° C = 111° F last week. It's been hot in the garden. Tonight: heavy winds, changing direction from East to West and back again. Then,

horizontal rain. Then, dead calm. Then, gentle rain. The transition from hot season to rainy season is always tumultuous. The heaviest weather is still before us.

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19 May

There are longer and shorter versions of *The Forest of the Amazon*. The shorter version is maybe forty-eight minutes in length. This is the version I know. The longer version, which I heard last night for the first time, runs another half-hour. Naturally, the themes and sections of the shorter version occur in different places, at different times, in the longer version – and, more obviously, there is much music not included in the shorter – so you will understand when I say that the two versions are related but distinctly different. The longer version is performed by the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra & Choir directed by John Neschling, with soprano Anna Korondi. Their interpretation, voice, and performance are different from that of the Symphony of the Air, Villa-Lobos, and Bidu Sayão. Certainly, it is easy to think that the composer's recording must be the definitive version, and yet both versions are beautiful. I doubt that Villa-Lobos would find fault with the new interpretation. I wonder whether he might even prefer it – oh, say in the way Dylan stated that Hendrix's version of *All Along the Watchtower* is better than his own.

According to the liner notes that accompany the recording by Neschling and Kirondi:

"One could say that the genesis of *Floresta do Amazonas* coincided with the moment when Villa-Lobos signed a contract to compose music for the film *Green Mansions*, based on the novel of the same name by William Henry Hudson, to be produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Unfamiliar as he was with the art of composing film scores, Villa-Lobos wrote his music as a great symphonic panel. He based it exclusively on the screenplay (by Dorothy Kingsley), without any idea of what the film was going to be like; possibly he believed that composing a soundtrack was similar to writing a ballet score.

"In spite of being in an advanced stage of the disease that ultimately led to his death in 1959, Villa-Lobos was excited about the project and soon left for Hollywood with the completed score in hand, arriving just as the first scenes of the film were being shot. He had not taken into account the need to match the sound track with the action in the footage. When asked about what would happen if his music did not fit the film exactly, his answer was simple: in that case, they will have to adjust the film...\*

"Eventually, MGM handed over Villa-Lobos's original score to their staff composer Bronislaw Kaper, himself an expert writer of film scores with a portfolio of numerous soundtracks. Kaper extracted a few themes from the original work and provided them with new harmonisations and arrangements, thereby practically composing a new score.

"For a composer of Villa-Lobos's standing and international fame, this represented a personal insult and he was deeply offended. Being a practical and ingenious man, however, he decided to salvage those parts of his work that MGM had not used,\*\* adding passages to the original music and reworking other parts. He also commissioned his poet-friend Dora Vasconcellos to write the lyrics to four songs that later became famous: *Veleiros* (Sailing Ships), *Cair da Tarde* (Twilight), *Cancao do Amor* (Love Song) and *Melodia Sentimental* (Sentimental Melody). And so he

composed the magnificent orchestral poem (or suite) for soprano, male chorus and symphony orchestra to which he gave the title *Floresta do Amazonas*, a work in 21 parts with an overture and an epilogue."

- Roberto Duarte (2010)

\* MGM will have to adjust their film? As Duarte writes, Villa-Lobos was a practical man.

\*\* The MGM movie, a flop that returned 1% of its \$25 million budget (large in those days), came and went. This is understandable: it's a silly, silly movie. MGM might have done well to 'adjust their film'. Fortunately, the cantata remains, and Villa-Lobos lived long enough to perform the short version with Bidu Sayão. Photo in Appendix B.

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*Purchas his Pilgrim, or the Historie of Man. Relating the Wonders of his Generation, Vanities in his Degeneration, Necessities of his Regenerations* (1619) ==> in post-production, no doubt *Green Mansions* by William Henry Hudson (1904) ==> film of same name

*Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (1933) ==> film of same name

*The African Queen* by C.S. Forester (1935) ==> film of same name

*Wizard of the Upper Amazon*, by F. Bruce Lamb (1974) ==> *The Emerald Forest* (1985)

However imaginary, such places exert a powerful pull, while exposing the basic cleavage in humanity's attitude toward this planet. If Samuel Purchas is any measure, then we've come a long way. The current estimate is that we have stripped approximately 20% of the Amazonas; but, to our credit, at least we have not sought oil in Shangri-la. Meanwhile, I wonder what has happened to the Brooks Range in Alaska since construction of the highway, with little doubt of what is to follow.

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Paolo Sorrentino's new English language film, *Youth*, is being screened at Cannes, and it has been reviewed in *Libération* and in *Variety*. Caine and Keitel have the leads. Setting? A Swiss spa. Theme? According to the reviewer in *Variety*: "So often in film (as well as life), aging becomes a subject for jokes about prostate problems and memory loss [...] but it's all minor chitchat that leads to equally natural discussions, and greater silences, about lost possibilities and the yearning for more out of life, even while it's slowly ebbing away." According to *Libération*: "On n'est jamais aussi bien que dans un spa pour philosopher sur l'existence: ses verts pâturages sont ainsi propices à des platitudes débitées sur le temps qui passe, bons mots de sagesse ancestrale et autres considérations sur la prostate."

I like Sorrentino's films. This one looks promising. It is scheduled for release in September.

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Quelle idée a eue votre ami, d'aller réveiller et attaquer la vanité de cette aristocratie bourgeoise !  
- Stendahl

This is the quotation that opens *Les Atticistes*, a novel by Eugène Green, the filmmaker from Brooklyn who has been in Paris since the 1970s. Late last night, while searching for information

about his most recent film, *La Sapienza* (2014), I came across an interview from 2012 in which Green speaks to a circle of culturati about his novel. Gallimard, the publisher, offered a PDF of the book's first chapter, which I downloaded and followed along as Green read from it during the 90-minute interview. It turns out that Green has published nine books and made as many films, all since 2001. He's been busy, then. And, it appears to me that he had an apprenticeship of 30 years before going public. That's unusual, these days, and it is partly why Gallimard describes Green as being *toujours contre-courant*: ever against the tide, the prevailing winds, the zeitgeist. He even speaks clearly, rather than mumbling – which makes sense, as he has been teaching the French their old Baroque diction. How Gaulling, coming from a former American (Green is a naturalized citizen). Yet, there he sits, anything but effete during the interview, looking like a disheveled *mousquetaire* newly arrived from Gascony – except that he is in his sixties now. So maybe he looks more like a retired musketeer. This is what I find so very odd. There is little or no pretense. He's serious and straightforward. And he appears to be at war against Stendahl's bourgeois aristocracy, whatever that means. Corporate culture, perhaps? Yes, I suspect it means rootless globalization and soulless technology. Why, because in the interview (as much as I can understand of it), Green is addressing the cleavage in Western, and specifically French, culture: conflict between rationalist and holistic worldviews – that is, the war between Bertrand Russell, say, and the ignorant men of the past. Progressives vs. Reactionaries, as the dialectic might have it. Green's campaign is a rearguard action, at least on first impression. Does this mean that Green is in favor of returning to the Ancien Regime? I do not think so. He's from Brooklyn, remember. I think he would have us make better use of Bertrand Russell's praiseworthy idleness. I think Green would have us recall our forebears, as do the Invisible People in *The Emerald Forest*. Respect for the past, without slavery to it, lest we forget who and what we are and whence we have come. Roots are important, as the old nun says in Paolo Sorrentino's *La Grande Bellezza*. The Renaissance began by looking back, by reclaiming what had been forgotten. Of course, I have seen neither, but something tells me that Greens' *La Sapienza* and Sorrentino's *Youth* (now at Cannes) are on the same wavelength. An alternative zeitgeist, then, and not just swimming against the tide for the sake of contrariness. This circle of culturati is open to anyone who is willing to take the time to make some little effort. It's active, rather than passive. It doesn't go with the flow. It strives. Think salmon – and I do not mean those from the fish farm.

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## Ce qu'il y a dans les documents déclassifiés sur Ben Laden

In a similar spirit, the time has come to release this item of previously classified personal history:

[redacted] an inquiry [redacted] seems more economical of time [redacted]  
[redacted] toward whatever decision you  
make in respect of [redacted]  
Currently, [redacted] no connection with any [redacted] intention to re-  
establish such. [redacted] carries older examples of [redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] affiliated, has [redacted]  
considerable differences [redacted] in history [redacted] has been private  
[redacted] or contracts for public [redacted]  
[redacted] will not prove too great an obstacle [redacted]

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22 May

Today is Friday. Not exactly depression, but I have been subject to a moody malaise all week. True, the weather has been unsettled. Janjira thinks that is why I am out of sorts.

I have no desire to leave the house, although I have replenished birdbaths and tended the garden, and I did go into town yesterday, of necessity, to collect laundry and to purchase two barrels of drinking water. I was in no mood for thoughtless drivers, but they were out in their numbers. You see, there is a point where thoughtlessness becomes fucking stupidity, or do I mean to say stupid fuckery. Oui, je sais. Le probleme c'est moi, sans doute.

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Talked with a States-side friend over the telephone. This was three or four days ago, and it is still on my mind. Subject: politics. The USA is polarized. Everyone has a scapegoat, while I think that political divisions come down to *separa et impera* or, alternatively, *divide et impera*. Whichever we call it, that's the game.

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Logic. Reason. Rationality. Intelligence. These words are not identical, but they overlap. Also, they are historically freighted, and a signification or an emphasis may differ from period to period – perhaps even from decade to decade. I am again listening to the interview with Eugène Green and, if I understand rightly what is being said, he is making a distinction between reason and intelligence: il y a l'esprit de finesse et l'esprit de géométrie. According to Pascal, the latter can be too abstractly disconnected. The context is the Baroque, and Green also remarks political power and influence upon reason, which, I think, these days might be seen as the constraint of ideology upon some broader intelligence. Not sure. I will try to sort this out. One problem is that my French is woefully inadequate; another problem is that I am half-educated. Not a good combination, this.

For example: Did I hear 'académie sensible' or 'académie sans cible'? I surely did hear Green say 'la académie de la perpétuelle jeunesse'.

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23 May, Saturday

Since 2010, France has recognized 'the right to be forgotten' (*le droit d'oubli*). It has to do with privacy, of course. Well, I am in favor of privacy. I am also sympathetic to those who have been slandered or libeled through malicious lies or unfortunate misapprehensions. Who wants to be subjected to such crap? Who would not want a fabricated smear removed from the Internet? On the other hand, there is the danger of history being erased – of bad deeds and bad faith being hidden from view. War criminals, corrupt politicians, paedophiles and the like would doubtless like to see their records expunged.

The conflict is between the right to forget and the right to know. If we must err in one direction or the other, it may be better to err in behalf of the right to remember.

What worries me about 'the right to forget' is the inevitable extensions that lawyers will argue, courts will order, and solons will pass into law. The abuses, then.

One might argue that the Islamic State is exercising such a right, as they demolish humanity's patrimony. I do not understand the destruction of museums and the denial of history. I am not sympathetic to the destruction of Palmyre, even if false gods were worshipped there, once upon a time.

Motivations to forget may differ, but their outworking may be too often the same.

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Returned home to find a four-foot snake in the studio. This one was pale green, flecked with black and yellow, and had a red tongue flicking from an intelligent-looking head. I escorted him out the door with the aid of an épée that has a button on its point. Over the years, we have had many snakes in the house (I stopped counting at thirty-seven, maybe ten years ago), but usually they are newly hatched, slender, and no more than three or four inches in length. Today, the visitor was fully grown – first time ever for that – and so it occurred to me that poisonous snakes might also find their way inside. Then, I would very likely remove the button. Gloves off, so to speak. Workhouse rules.

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24 May

*L'âme du monde est profondément malade.*

*« L'homme n'est plus relié à rien. C'est le désarroi tragique de l'homme moderne. Il n'est plus relié à son passé, il est en train de se désolidariser de son futur et il a pensé, probablement aveuglé par l'hypertrophie de la technique et de la technologie qu'il pouvait détacher sa branche de l'arbre de la création. »*

The soul of the world is profoundly ill.

"Humanity is no longer connected to anything. This is the tragic confusion of modern man. He is no longer connected to his past, he is in process of undoing his future, and he thinks, probably being blinded by the all-pervasiveness of technology, that he can detach his branch from the tree of creation."

Translation mine, such as it is. Do not wonder about the tone of the language employed. The remarks are from a conference that began three days ago in the French Senate – a colloquium on climate and religion. No, not the religious climate – but rather, *climate change*. What... religion and climate, taken together? Apparently, the common denominator is that both are heating up. And, according to *Le Monde*, a joint statement is forthcoming from Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Meanwhile, djihadists have attacked a Shiite community in Egypt, as they commence destruction of Palmyra. I doubt that any joint statement will have much effect on these folks. Oddly, such militants want to disconnect from (obliterate and forget) the past, as they oppose aspects of our present all-pervasive technology and the future prospect of a secularized world order.



It occurs to me that ISIL is advancing more or less at will in Syria, which state has a nuclear capability. I suspect that Israel will do something, if and when ISIL gets too close to procuring such weapons.

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25 May

*"I'd rather give birth to a porcupine, backwards, than be mayor of Los Angeles."*

- William Mulholland

About ten years after Mulholland's pipeline brought Owens Valley water to Los Angeles, with a four-fold surplus, El Lay was again running dry. So, the Department of Water started to look at Mono Lake and the Colorado River... The story is documented in *Cadillac Desert*, along with the building of Hoover Dam and the other dams and diversion projects that followed. Now, we have Phoenix, Las Vegas, and sprawl along the Front Range of Colorado. When I flew into DIA in 1997, late in the year when the landscape is a desiccated brown, I could see the green of the golf courses and the blue of the swimming pools. As I write, water is being rationed in California.

As feats of engineering, the water projects were stunning. But, when thinking about how they were implemented (back-room politics), and the impact they have had, it is difficult to avoid certain free associations: for example, Mallory saying "Because it is there" in explanation of why he would climb Everest; or, the historian Stephen Ambrose describing the difference between Crazy Horse and Custer as one between a *state of being* and a *state of becoming*; or, photographs of mountainous piles of buffalo bones or elephant tusks with some Great White Hunter in the foreground; or the photograph of American soldiers standing on the skeletons of Filipinos.



Too much of a ramble? I think we are talking about an attitude that manifests itself in different ways. We are talking about an attitude toward this planet (or the creation or the Great Mother or Spaceship Earth, take your pick). We are talking about accepting or denying certain limitations, about living in balance or pursuing whatever one wants. We are talking about short-term gains versus long-term consequences.

We have been able to manipulate nature, even trick it, for quite some time. The Western United States is an unrealistic and over-developed *Never Land* erected upon broken treaties, backroom

politics, the damming of rivers, and the flooding of canyons. Never mind all the dead bodies and expendable human resources.

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The St. Francis Dam gave way, and the Baldwin Hills Reservoir. Should the Hoover Dam go, dominoes will fall.

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In Mulholland's time, there were plans to bring water down from Alaska by pipeline. Later came the oil pipeline. In this drought, someone must be thinking once again about a pipeline for water. If something can be done, it will be done, sooner or later.

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Richard Lair just sent a link to an on-line article in *The New Yorker*. Here's the caption: [photograph] *Lake Mead, which forms the border between Nevada and Arizona, thirty miles from Las Vegas. The lake is fed by the Colorado and was last full in 1998. Since then, its volume has fallen by some sixty per cent, and the water level has dropped more than a hundred feet.*

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26 May

Nor did Janjira know that a new law was promulgated 14 February this year. I just learned of it:

The Royal Institute of Thailand (ราชบัณฑิตยสถาน) has been reformed. It is now the Royal Society of Thailand (ราชบัณฑิตยสภา), with a secretariat's office. This office is an independent department within the executive branch, now controlled by the military.

The renaming of the institute was objected by many of its fellows, mainly because there was no public hearing of the matter. The new law establishes a welfare fund for the members of the society. It is unclear whether this fund is included in this year's budget of THB 168,439,000.

Motto of the Society's seal: "Wisdom is at par with weaponry" (ปัญญาประคองอาวุธ).

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«*Je sais que des tas de gens projettent une quelconque manoeuvre politique, mais ce n'est pas du tout dans ma tête...* » - Daniel Cohn-Bendit

*"I know that a heap of people project some political maneuver, but this is not at all in my head..."*

Odd, then, that Cohn-Bendit should think to remark it. He is seventy years of age now, and he has only recently obtained French citizenship – although he was at the front of the student protests of May 1968, in Paris. (Q: Hey, where'd he come from?) Now, Cohn-Bendit is both French and German. Of this double identity, he states that, when he is in Germany, he is the

most French of the Germans. So, naturally, when he is in France, he is the most German of the French. Bon. Sounds to me as though Herr Monsieur wants another post with the EU, only this time something with more teeth than being a deputy minister of the environment.

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27 May

Family values and dynastic squabbles. You know: *The Lion in Winter* (monarchy at its best). In France, the National Front has similar troubles. It's not just the rift between Jean-Marie Le Pen and his daughter, Marine. Now, there is a third player, respectively *his* grand-daughter and *her* niece:

"Marion Maréchal-Le Pen confirme être candidate du Front national en Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) [...] La députée du Vaucluse, qui s'était déjà déclarée candidate en avril, avait mis sa candidature entre parenthèses le 5 mai pour ne pas être l'« otage » du conflit opposant sa tante Marine Le Pen à son grand-père Jean-Marie Le Pen. Elle avait été investie officiellement par le bureau politique du Front national."

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We have yet another ancestor, found not so far from Aunt Lucy – *Australopithecus deyiremeda* – which is said to be 3.4 million years old. If I recall rightly, Aunt Lucy was once said to have lived some 2 million years ago. Now it is 3.2 million years ago. Both figures are derived from carbon dating techniques that have vastly improved since the dead certainties of the 1970s.

At this point, you may be wondering about hominids/australopithicines, but please don't look to me. I only know what I read in the papers. We have *Australopithecus afarensis*, said to descend from *Australopithecus anamensis*. Nor should we forget *Australopithecus bahrelghazali* and *Kenyanthropus platyops*. And now, *Australopithecus deyiremeda*. I suppose someone will sort it out, at least temporarily.

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28 May - There have been many 'accidents' with tour buses in the last six months, here in Lampang, and yet another happened yesterday. A bus collided with a van carrying students, then it continued on through the intersection of the busiest street in town, only to crash into a brick building, which it demolished. Fifty injured (one girl lost a leg), and six dead, including one of the drivers. Several serious head injuries, and so a long day for Janjira and the anesthesiology department.

Tomorrow, she must travel to Bangkok by van. Why, because there is a conference. Every time she goes to one of these convocations, I hold my breath. The roads are crazy, and it's a numbers game. There was a time when Thailand had the highest rate of vehicular fatalities, per capita, in the entire world. Now, the country is rated third, so perhaps there has been some little improvement, although the difference between the highest and the third-highest fatality rates is narrow. I would say the difference is negligible, were I a cold-blooded statistician.

Wasn't it Stalin who observed that one death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic?

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29 May

Janjira says that news reports are conflicting. Some say that three people died in the crash, and it turns out that the girl has not lost her leg, as yet. Her injuries are serious, but surgeons may have done the trick. She remains in the ICU.

Have just returned from taking Janjira to the hospital. Her travel bag is packed. She will leave by van for Bangkok sometime this afternoon. The conference there is about Professional Development, whatever that means. Networking? Subscribing to journals? Dressing for success? Tailoring a resumé? Listening to some representative from a manufacturer of pharmaceuticals? Discussing further applications of the psychometric five-point Likert scale? Attending still more seminars and conferences? She once told me that she has never heard anything she did not already know at any conference she has ever attended. But then attendance, of itself, is professional development.

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30 May

Time for morning coffee with Yours Truly, who, after putting aside his Venezuelan Trade Supplement, noticed a story of academic chicanery. What a great way to start the day. Two days ago, the prestigious and influential journal *Science* retracted a study published last December. In reporting the journal's retraction, there is an interesting difference in emphasis between *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*.

*Le Monde's* emphasis is upon the manipulation of data and perpetration of fraud. *The New York Times's* emphasis is upon the misrepresentation of sponsorship and misallocation of funding. In both reports, the culprit is a doctoral candidate in political science, a guy who is now receiving considerably wider attention than comes with his circle of *Facebook* friends.

'Bye-'bye career? So long, doctorate? And, above all, will he be un-friended?

What interests me most is that 'peer review' happened six months after publication, and such review did not occur in the offices of *Science*.

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Oh, for a blue sky full of drones. I can envision the coming collisions, when the damn things malfunction and fall to the pavement. *Safety first*: when you decide to cross a street, first look left and right; and then, look up.

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31 May

Janjira is returning from Bangkok this evening. Without mishap, I hope. I hate the highways, here. Meanwhile, my ideal reader, here is an excerpt from an e-pistle to a friend who this morning sent me an article on 'anomalous events' published in *Scientific American*. Voilà:

"Good timing. Yesterday, I paid a visit to an ex-pat's somewhat remote orchard up in the hills. I have promised to visit for the past five years, and yesterday was the day -- which lasted into the evening. I met one or two new people who spend considerable time with anomalous events, but the talk did not become too outré. First meeting, I suspect. Also, the host told me that a latter arrival was from a well-heeled family (founders of a well-known bank) with houses in Aspen, northern California, and Hawaii, and that their immediate circle of friends and associates are subscribers to para-normality and related phenomena. You might start with 'sixth sense' or 'third eye'.

At one point during the evening, the host took me aside to ask two things: 1) my description of humanity in the main (I replied that we are 'a botch'); and 2) do I believe in the existence of evil (I replied that I have never known where to put Dr. Mengele on a five-point Likert Scale, other than at zero for empathy). The evening's discussion turned mostly upon varieties of trees, the California Angels, and a concise history of master-slave relations. Anyway, you can imagine my surprise. For starters, the host and guests are educated and connected people with considerably more experience of 'the real world' than I have. So, you may be wondering what I was doing there. But, the real question becomes: why was I invited back?"

The foregoing is not precisely what I wrote to my friend -- it is adapted to this journal -- but it is accurate as to the gist. And here, gentle reader, I will convey to you a thought that crossed my fevered mind only this morning: last night's barbecued ribs might have been human -- baby-back, you see -- if the shape-shifting Martians have the same sense of humor as Hannibal Lecter. No, it did not get that strange; but, had we known each other better... who knows. The host told me that the scion and his circle believe in extraterrestrials, and the name *David Icke* popped up but was not pursued.

Maybe I should start painting again and just stay in the studio. You know: have meals slipped under the door.

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Then again, the purpose behind questioning me as to the existence of evil may have been to determine whether I am 'beyond good and evil' -- as a cognizant Arya must be. Apologies, but I think that I am not. And if, in fact, I possess powers that I do not realize, then leave it at that.

\*\*\*\*\*

1 June

When I awoke this morning, I knew immediately that it was the first day of June, because when I opened my window to look out, this guy down below yelled up at me "Hey, you son-of-a-bitch, it's the first day of June." That's Jack Douglas, more or less, and the book was called *Never Trust A Naked Bus Driver*. I'm not sure what is making me remember Douglas's book, whose opening line was concerned with the first day of spring, not June. I happened across this book of forced humor when I was twelve. I recall also that his text was 'interdisciplinary' insofar as it mentions another book authored by a Dr. Theodore Gleckle, entitled *Espresso Is Thicker Than Water*. Not that there is any such book, only that this was the state of humor around 1959. Yes, there was a

time when this was funny. And there was a time when people told jokes, which seldom happens these days, a period of many years of monologues and diatribes.

How is it that jokes have fossilized? Usually, someone or something is the butt (that's the term) of a joke, and I think this is why they are no longer told: a certain form of tolerance is no longer with us. The day is gone when bearing up under a barrage of 'ethnic slurs' was an initiation into a group of peers or drinking buddies. When I was growing up, this sort of oral onslaught was called *the dozens* among the denizens of East Los Angeles (code for 'blacks' – now known as 'people of color', which to me is a round-about way of saying 'colored people' as pointed out in George Carlin's now 25-years old monologue on euphemisms and soft language). The Dozens was a method for testing one's coolness under pressure and adroitness at comebacks/repartee. The first party to 'lose it' (composure, that is), lost. Maybe the old cutting sessions of rappers were a carry-over.

Things change. I suppose we could ask which form is the more confrontational, or perhaps the more objectionable. Is one form more acceptable than another, and upon what basis? Does it matter? Should we stipulate? Should we seek funding, organize a focus group, and undertake a study? What do you think, "whi-whi-whi-Whitey?" (Richard Pryor, ca. 1970 – followed by a 1930s rim shot).

It was an old friend, Tom Vogel, who told me of his grandfather (was it?), who every morning went into the bank to open, privately, his locked strong box. He did this every day, year after year, and everyone assumed that he was adding to a stash, until the day he died, at which time the box was opened for all to see. Inside, to everyone's consternation, there were no jewels or bonds. There was, however, a little black book. Inside the book, the deceased had jotted down his favorite jokes, one per day. Now, there's a legacy.

No one has time for 'shaggy dog stories' – not now, and not when they were first told. Here's my favorite, which I heard from Tim Snode:

This inebriated gent comes into Danny Boy's Pub trailed by a shaggy dog. The fellow sits at the bar, and the dog jumps up onto the stool next to him. The bartender sees this, comes over, looks at the dog, looks at the drunk, and then points to a sign on the wall: NO PETS.

"Can't you read?" he asks.

"That I can," affirms the drunkard, "but this is no ordinary canine. This here can talk!"

The bartender doesn't particularly care to hear this: "G'on, git!" he snarls. So the drunk says:

"You look like a sportin' man. I tell ya, this dog can talk. And if I prove it, will ya stand me a round?"

By now, the other customers have gathered around. So the bartender says:

"All right. Prove the dog can talk, and there's one on the house waitin' for ya."

"Start pourin'," says the drunk, and he turns to the dog: "What does the bark of an elm feel like?"

"Rough, rough!" replies the dog; and, of course, the bartender is looking at the ceiling while everyone chuckles.

So the drunk continues: "What covers this building?"

"Roof, roof!" says the dog.

"G'on..." scowls the bartender.

The drunk shows the palms of his hands and says: "Wait, here's a real question..."

"Let's hear it then, and it better be good," says the bartender. With that, the drunk turns to the dog:

"Who's the best player, *ever*, for the New York Yankees?"

"Ruth, Ruth!" says the dog, wagging its tail.

"That's it! Out with ya!" yells the bartender, coming around the counter to grab the drunk by the collar and throw him into the street. And that was that.

The drunk is now sitting on the curb, dusting himself, and shaking his head at the dog. The dog turns to him, shrugs, and says: "Maybe I should have said DiMaggio?"

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Today's big question in *Libération*: "Pourquoi le mot *queue* est-il féminin et le mot *vagin* masculin ?"

Gender in language is not the only objectionable feature, it goes without saying, in these days of so-called culture wars. Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *China Men*, once remarked 'changing the world one word at a time'. In this case, from Chinamen to China Men – and she had a point. But many words have become so distorted as to no longer carry meaning. I have written previously about *art*, and how this term now encompasses *anti-art*. Even Duchamp remarked this state of affairs as having put him in a difficult position.

Transformation of language is to be expected, but I suspect that the deformation of language is another aspect of civilization winding down. Duchamp would be indifferent, of course, for it is true that civilizations come and go. Meanwhile, Spengler must be smiling, somewhere.

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2 June

When the day comes that newspapers switch their copy to sans-serif fonts, I probably will stop paying attention to our absurd little world. I find that sans-serif fonts are harder to read – my eyes slide right over them – but they are everywhere now. Yeah-yeah, I know one should adapt, but the truth is that I disliked sans-serifs forty years ago, except in headlines, movie titles or book covers, business cards, corporate logos, perfume and lingerie ads, that sort of thing. Anything that needs to look CONTEMPORARY. You know what I mean: COKE It's the *real* thing.

Not to be sniffy about it, but, without fail, the font that most surely gives me hives (and which should be legislated out of existence) is Comic Sans MS. I simply adore this font when it is colored orange. I even know one or two longtime adults who use it – which puts me in mind of a magazine publisher who once printed a "think piece" in Ding Bats (why, because he felt that font was appropriate to the ideas being expressed).

Της αυτηορ μας ηαπε βεεν α Νεο-Χον, νοτ τηατ τηισ περσυασιον ηας α μονοπολψ ον νονσενσε.

No, this is not in Greek. The letters are standing in for Ding Bats, which I do not have. Then again, because I have correspondents who use Comic Sans MS, I am forced to keep that one.

*All for now, kids!*

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Before & After. Interesting revisions to an 'assessment tool' that has undergone a transparent development(al) re-evaluation process:

NOT...

management of the condition  
cost implications  
conflicts of interest  
organizational barriers  
patients' views  
supported with tools for application

BUT...

management of the health issue  
resource implications  
competing interests  
facilitators and barriers  
views of the target population  
provides advice and/or tools on how  
the recommendations can be put into  
practice

The first version was bad enough, wouldn't you agree? One reason I am not a member of any editorial committee is because I would have written the first draft this way:

treatment  
costs  
disagreement  
assholes  
opinions  
has instructions



\*\*\*\*\*

5 June

I often worry about loss of memory, but I recalled something last night that surprised me greatly – something retrieved from who knows where, a side path off a back-country neural route – the title to a film that I saw once only, in 1979, and based upon a book I have not read by an author whose name I could not place with the story. The process of recollection began after I watched *The Phantom of the Open Hearth*, a Jean Shepard yarn about prom night. Shepard's title made me think of *The (Something) of Heaven*. That *something* wasn't the *Loom*, or *Skein*, or *Web*, or *Foundry*, or *Weir*, all of which I entered into a search engine. Finally, I remembered: *Lathe*. Voilà, it came up on You Tube, along with an interview: Bill Moyers talking with Ursula K. Le Guin. So, I listened to the interview and then watched *The Lathe of Heaven*. After that, I read Le Guin's biography at Wikipedia, only to discover that I knew of her except her name. I have not read any of her writing, unless I read something in 1970, when I attended Dr. Michelson's inaugural course in Science Fiction at CSU on a dare with myself. You see, for the most part, I am unmoved by science fiction as well as fantasy. Never acquired a taste for either, although in my teens I was for a time backpacking through J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth. Anyway, I found some interesting statements ascribed to Ms. Le Guin:

"You decided to deal with the devil", she wrote in her letter of resignation from the Author's Guild, in protest of Google's book digitalization project. "There are principles involved, above all the whole concept of copyright; and these you have seen fit to abandon to a corporation, on their terms, without a struggle." Well, this may be simple self-interest: concern about lost sales. But not just Google. Le Guin, in a speech for acceptance of a lifetime achievement award, also criticized Amazon of profiteering. I cannot imagine any writer fifty years her junior taking such a stance, publicly.

This puts me in mind of K., who describes Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos and their clones as "little emissaries of Satan". Admittedly, I, too, have similar warm, fuzzy feelings. Hello Kitty. "Originally aimed at pre-adolescent females, Hello Kitty's market has broadened to include adult consumers." Here in Thailand, Hello Kitty stickers are found on everything from school supplies to pullovers to computers to macho trucks. Dream them away, George Orr. Antwerp!

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6 June

With interest flagging, enthusiasm exhausted, energy spent, desire depleted, and hope at bay, it's a new day. What to do with it?

This morning, a friend has written to ask whether I know about John Oliver, who "went off on Thailand's obsession with Hitler" over the Home Box Office channel. I was surprised to learn that HBO still exists, because I have had the impression that cable television is something of a dinosaur. But then, I have not watched commercial or cable television for thirty-five years, nor PBS for twenty. Anyway, I made this reply:

"I know of John Oliver but have not seen him. There are many outsiders who do not understand Thailand's various obsessions. There is usually a 'disconnect' at work. For example, advocates of laissez-faire capitalism and the corporate world can have images of Che Guevara on their tee shirts, Mercedes Benz bumpers, etc. Pacino as Serpico is big on the mud flaps of 18-wheelers. On the same vehicle, what's next to Pacino? Hello Kitty. As to Hitler, what I see are a few motorcyclists wearing WW2 German helmets. Nothing else. I have no doubt that he has his admirers here, as everywhere, but to say that Thailand is obsessed with Hitler is simply silly."

It would have been better to say that it is doubtful whether interest in Hitler rises to the dignity of a national obsession. I am certain that many people here admire Hitler's orderly society, which may be one reason that Bangkok has fostered so many military regimes these past nine decades.

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Two hours later:

Just finished watching the John Oliver segment on Hitler in Thailand. He is right on the mark when he says of the Hitler laxative: "That doesn't even make fucking sense, Thailand".

Yes. The disconnect is nearly absolute. Thai graphic designers and digital artists are often ignorant of history. They are too often like crows that pick up something shiny-looking. The weirdest juxtapositions happen.

As to the young girl who painted the swastika in school, Mr. Oliver (or his writers) did not understand what he saw. The swastika is widespread in Asia as a symbol of blessing. Hitler appropriated it. The reason the girl painted the Nazi oak leaf cluster around the swastika, in the red, black, and white colors of the party, is because she copied the first image she found on Google.

What a world. A digital world of floating, rootless /significations/.  
Speaking of which:

I just exhumed an exquisite corpse for appropriation as an epigraph to this journal, in this case five limbs cut from the first chapter of *Les Atticistes*. The corpse is not without blemish, because I added three words – grande / et / aussi – thereby compromising the purity of surrealist aleatory. In some circles, unforgivable and irredeemable heresy.

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*L'atticisme* is an historical tendency in literature and art, especially in France. It manifests a restrained classicism that comes with conservatism. Politically, this means monarchism, which is seen as the only form of stable government – never mind the dynastic squabbles or the rule of tyrants. Over against this, there exists the Enlightenment tyranny of some majority, especially when that majority becomes an unruly mob. This is an aspect of democracy. Meanwhile, of course, a republic fears both monarchical despotism and unwieldy democracy, because the mass of humanity is too busy with Facebook and video games to become 'informed in the premises'. Not that 'representatives of the people' are better informed so much as they are better connected and generally more presentable at social functions than are the Great Unwashed. Ahem.

An example of shifting persuasions is Joseph Maistre. Apparently, Maistre began public life as a Freemason who favored a rational republic. Then came the French Revolution.

Selon *Wikipedia*: Joseph-Marie, comte de Maistre "claimed that the crimes of the [Reign of Terror](#) were the [logical consequence](#) of [Enlightened](#) thought, as well as its divinely-decreed punishment".

This is what makes the French Revolution so disturbing. The Reign of Terror was a logical consequence, yes, because logic had become irrational. Saturn ate his children, just as Goya painted it. But still, what to make of divinely-decreed punishment? This is the sort of claim that makes for muddles, even if God (Saturn, say) does exist and from time to time exhibits a certain testy displeasure toward his childish creatures.

Why must we be either Jesuits or Jansenists, Freemasons or Fascists, Liberals or Conservatives? Back and forth, back and forth. Not that I am proposing Ursula K. Le Guin's evolutionarily successful Taoist jellyfish as a model. Yes, you must listen to her interview with Bill Moyers to understand this remark, and perhaps also read her biography at *Wikipedia*. You know: become informed in the premises. (Or, re-read 5 June, above, if your short-term memory is only 1GB.)

The French Revolution led to Napoleon, which was arguably not as bad as the Weimer Republic leading to Hitler. Nevertheless, we are not done with either. The same old arguments are being made in France, although vocabulary has changed in the past 200 years, and our technology has outstripped everyone's ability to study, absorb, and reflect. It is difficult to assess. Perhaps blogs and #tweets are the new incarnation of 18<sup>th</sup> century coffeehouses (seeing through windows that conversation has gone missing and solipsism generally reigns inside any Starbuck's).

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7 June

Today, I heard that Thai teachers of primary education are being taken to task because their students cannot read or write, for reason that none is learning the Thai alphabet. However, their pupils can use smart phones. Put these factoids together and you may, like me, think that the near-future will be entirely audio-visual. A public relations paradise. *Hello Kitty*, for everyone.

It appears to me that, with corporate feudalism, an elite will remain literate and 'informed in the premises', while worker ants (thee and me) filing around in the mall will be mindlessly enjoying circuses and paying taxes to subsidize the privileged and well-connected few (a large absolute number, but a small percentage) who will be using a different layer of the Internet reserved to educated, specialized discourse. Think parallel universes, one stacked atop the other.

Also, today, I heard hearsay that Google and Amazon are buying real estate in the communities of Mountain View and Cupertino. The land is intended for townhouses, condos, and apartments for employees, who, just out of college, are earning \$100,000 per annum but paying \$5,000+ per month in rent. Well, this makes no sense to a rational mind – yours and mine, of course – given

the formula that expenditure for housing should not exceed 25% of income. No doubt, Google and Amazon have considered this, too, and have engineered an equitable solution for everyone.

And, the "new normal" has come to Loveland, Colorado. A friend wrote to say there have been three shootings in two days, with two fatalities. Time now for the immutable *Law of Open Carry* to kick in. After all, just recently, wasn't someone with 1) a camera on his head, and 2) a fully automatic weapon, walking around taunting guards inside the Atlanta airport? Apparently, the fellow was exercising his legal rights of open carry and freedom of speech. One wonders, had he been joined by five or six others of like mind, whether that might have been seen as an exercise in freedom of assembly. Meanwhile, elsewhere:

Liberty, democracy, and the Rights of /(hu)Man(kind)/ have been announced as the principles and goals of G7, now in progress. One commentator describes it as 'democracy in the arms of Big Brother'. Well, now... moving on to another set of Google Earth GPS coordinates:

A new law protects regional languages and dialects, facilitating their acceptance for daily use in the public domain/sector/arena/discourse. The question is whether headsets and translators will be required for all, as in the UN general assembly. I suspect that, over time, a patois will assert itself. (As to English as the *lingua franca*, forget it, 'cause 'because' is now 'coz' and 'going to' has become a bound form in descriptions of grammar. The language is breaking down. This is approximately how Latin morphed into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Romanian, etc. – so, in this case, legislation is merely facilitating a natural process: namely, entropy).

Which, in a way, returns us to Atticism, which we touched upon yesterday. Ah, gentle reader ... what goes around, comes around. I think it was *The Village Idiot* (No. 17) which insisted we be (*soit*, s'il vous plait) still living in and dealing with the repercussions of the French Revolution.

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9 June

Insomnia omnia, so I have been watching black and white movies from the 1940s, and the last three have each had ballroom scenes in which an orchestra plays *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles*. But then, a couple months ago, I watched three different 1980s detective yarns with soundtracks that featured Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* – not in succession, but in the space of a week.

Coincidences. Great. Something to think about while I'm still up.

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Are you needlessly concerned with 'temporal and spatial variability of personal exposure to radio frequency electro-magnetic fields'? Well, you shouldn't be, because wireless radiation has been classified as Group 2B, which means it is only *possibly* carcinogenic, according to disinterested, inconclusive studies. Besides, such fields are everywhere you go, and there's really nothing to be done, so just kick back and enjoy.

Actually, cancer is not really the point. Rather, it is the possible disruption of brain waves, and the cumulative effects of electro-magnetic bombardment on mood, thought, memory, and the immune system. Given economics, I have little doubt that studies will remain inconclusive for decades to come, as happened during the controversy over tobacco – not that I think WiFi bears any resemblance to Winston cigarettes.

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Coz they are forever compiling lists, it may have been *Rolling Stone Magazine* that published The 100 Best Novels of the 20th Century – unless it was a listing of the most influential novels, which may be a distinction without a difference. To my surprise, and without a reading program, I had read two-thirds of the books on the list. Just now, I cannot find the list, nor can I recall all of the titles on it, so there is no way to know whether the list that I propose to make, immediately below, would overlap those 100 Best which I have or have not read. You see, the new category I wish to propose has nothing to do with 'best' or 'most influential' – nothing of the sort, per se – although it does have to do with renowned books of a certain reputation that encounter my innate philistinism. That said, and in no particular order, here is a far-from-definitive listing of the *Books That I Put Down for One Reason or Another*. One on this list was read three-fourths of the way before I decided that I just did not give a damn – others, half way. The minimum read, based upon principle, is the first chapter, or ten pages, whichever comes first. (To this day, some forty-five years after the fact, there is but a single volume which I put down before finishing the opening paragraph: "What can you say about a twenty-five year old girl who died – that she loved Bach, the Beatles, atticisme parisien, infectious diseases, and me?" Something like that. (Yeah, I know... I remember it, and so I should stop avoiding cafés with wall-to-wall WiFi.)

The Alexandria Quartet. Malone Dies. Under the Volcano. Finnegans Wake. Babel Tower. The Magic Mountain. The Razor's Edge. Pnin. V. The Crying of Lot 49. Daniel Martin. Ulysses (which I like, but was three times distracted away). The Secret Agent. The Information. Bonfire of the Vanities. 2001: A Space Odyssey. The Worm Ouroboros. The Joy Luck Club. The Color Purple. The Satanic Verses. Rabbit Is Rich. Loving Monsters. Nancy Drew & The Hidden Window Mystery. There must be others, but no more come to mind, at the moment. These days, I am forgetful of titles. And, naturally, there are books from other centuries that I have put down, but as centuries soon become millennia, the list is rather long. The flip side of this is that I have read seven works by Gertrude Stein, including *The Making(s) of Americans*, don't ask me why. Can I recall the titles? *Lucy Church, Amiably. Tender Buttons. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. Paris, France. Four Saints in Three Acts.*

Here, I must check Wikipedia. Ah. *Ida A Novel*. I do not remember it. In fact, I remember little of anything from these six books, plus a play. Only two lines come readily to mind:

*Pigeons on the grass, alas / And a magpie in the sky.*

*It makes it well fish.*

The first is from *Four Saints*, the second is from *Tender Buttons*. Also, there was another book that I recall reading, entitled *The Making of the Making of Americans*, which was precisely the

same length as *The Making of Americans*. A memoir? A joke? I cannot recall. Perhaps it was someone's biography of Stein, I am not sure. Nor can I find it at Wikipedia. Final possibility: it is a brain-fart of one thousand pages. One other thing, too. I see that Wikipedia gives the title as *The Makings*, not *The Making*. I seem to recall the singular, on the spine of my Modern Library edition. No doubt some future editor will set it right, one way or the other.

Why would someone read these? A partial explanation is that I must have been 19-21 years of age at the time; Picasso was still alive, although Duchamp had recently died; I was listening to Satie and reading about the Ballet Russe; Pop and Op were in the air, with their roots in uprooted *dada*; it was the late-60s, early-70s. At that time, it was still possible to think that the future held open possibilities, and an impressionable young person might easily enjoy Picabia's drawings of machines and attend an Expo on the same day. In reading Stein, I was likely looking for the key to, or the source of, our then-modern 20<sup>th</sup> century culture, because she conducted the salon at 27 Rue des Fleurs, where everyone came, and she was said to have influenced so many, including expatriate Americans. You know the tune: the avant-garde, the Lost Generation. How romantic. See Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (right?), if only to see Adrien Brody as Dali. Priceless, he is.

I have mentioned these things before, haven't I? Just realized the fact. I hope you will excuse the pointless repetition. Such comes with the present territory. And there was another of Stein's books that I read. *The Mother of Us All*. So that's how it goes – someone has to have my dicey memory, and it may as well be me.

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“I left finance because it is too commodified...” Mr. Krimershmoy said.

Uh-huh. Left finance, to do what? Why, to escape commodification and to publish ARTENOL, a new arts magazine, that's what.

Come again...?

Sorry, I cannot help myself. It's Krimershmoy's remark, not just *The Blue Parrot* in progress, which puts me in mind of *Casablanca*:

RENAULT: And what in heaven's name brought you to Casablanca?

RICK: My health. I came to Casablanca for the waters.

RENAULT: The waters? What waters? We're in a desert!

RICK: I was misinformed.

Was finance ever *not* commodified? Meanwhile, if Krimershmoy and his accomplices (Dann and Melamid) can separate contemporary art from the commodities market, they'll receive a free-lunch Tip of the Hatlo Hat, outside Koonsville.

DECRYPTION (read as needed before meals, to avoid upset stomach):

ARTLENOL is a pun on Tylenol. One of ARTLENOL's founders is Alex Melamid, formerly of the art-duo Komar & Melamid. These two are now estranged, reportedly, but they go all the way back to the Soviet Union, where they were art students. They emigrated to the USA ca. 1970, produced art through their 'corporation' – after parodying the Soviet system, they went to work on the American system – and, by the late-1990s, they were painting with Thai elephants. Their friend and associate is/was David Sultzer (*aka* 'Dave Soldier'), a neuroscientist (at Columbia U) who is also a versatile musician and the founder, along with Richard Lair, of the Thai Elephant Orchestra, based here in Lampang. As these people do things, I watch. My tenuous connection happens through Lair, who hosts the occasional dinner party at which one meets a neuroscientist who plays violin and Spanish guitar. So much for deep background. And that's what happened yesterday. I read about ARTLENOL. *The New York Times* had a write-up. (Actually, I hope that ARTLENOL proves to be an anodyne.) Now...

Who has not heard something about Jeff Koons, his poodle, and his porn star wife who was elected to the Italian parliament? Also, the absurd prices paid at art auctions. Robert Hughes, back around 1980, was the first critic to mention the commodification of art, as far as I can recall, and then Barbara Rose wrote incisively about it. I surely mentioned this in *Daybook*, and it is one reason I stopped reading the art press in 1982. Not Rose, but commodification and hype. Art stars. On connaît la chanson.

Almost forgot: Jimmy Hatlo was a popular cartoonist, whose work is now characterized as an early example of social media. He gave credit where it is due, many of his ideas coming from others. Hence, the Tip of the Hatlo Hat. Jess Koons, I believe, has been influenced by cartoons. 'Koonsville', then, is *le beau monde aujourd'hui*. As to Krimershmoy's remark and the lines from *Casablanca*, think about it. Otherwise, see *The Mona Lisa Curse* (2008), to understand the history of the transformation of art into an investment vehicle and medium of exchange.

According to some of my long-time correspondents, DECRYPTION should be a regular feature not only of this journal but of everything I write. I am sure my old friends are correct, because I sometimes wonder, when reading some paragraph written earlier, just what was I thinking.

Yes, I know *Jess* should be *Jeff*. But, sooner or later, one begins to forget. In any case, give me the Watts Tower and murals in East Los Angeles, any day – or, for all that, the Sistine ceiling.

11 June

Commodification and the trans-valuation of values – these two are intricately entwined (sorry, *intertwined*) or they are a tangled mess, your choice. My real preference is to say they go hand in glove (perhaps Givency gloves with TINY POISONOUS ROMANTIC FLOWERS – you know:

'spiritually dark romanticism with geometric animal star coding'. Ursa Major, then? Clearly, this is gut-level corporate *haute couture*, with its electronic eye on bulk data.)

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What bothers me about appropriation is vampirism and the arrogance that accompanies it. This is not to say that quotations and allusions are elitist of themselves. No, what bothers me is the conception that popular, even mass culture can be sucked up to become High Art. The notion is rarefied, condescending, and faux-democratic. The mindset entails the alchemical transmutation of dross into gold. By now, everyone knows that a souvenir plaster poodle from some gift shop will never fetch \$35 million at Christies, but an appropriation in porcelain that is executed by studio assistants may do exactly that, if the style simulates that of a Renaissance workshop. This situation is not exactly what Duchamp intended, is it, but such transmutation occurs every day on the auction block. Why? It's not just hype and *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Nor is it complete cynicism, except on the part of name-brand artists. It seems to involve investors who would like to be remembered for assembling an approximation of Gertrude Stein's collection on the walls at 27 Rue de Fleurus. They would buy her influence on history, as it were. It also involves dealers who are *wannabe* Vollards, Udes, and Kahnweilers.

What a gooey mess: the quantification of quality, the monetization of history, the search for notoriety (among artists, the new normal for accomplishment), the photo ops, the videotaped interviews, the Old Master blockbusters, the retrospectives at age thirty, the faux avant-garde in the academies, the MBAs directing museums (probably not what the French revolutionaries had in mind), the viral #tweets, and the mindless sign-systems of our digital world (tomorrow's high art:



Source: National Portrait Gallery (London)

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13 June

Spent yesterday at Chiang Mai Immigration. The annual visa run. This morning, I looked at yesterday's e-mail, including one from a longtime correspondent. In part, my friend wrote:

"I am never quite sure of where it is that you are going. Your writings, lumped together, seem to me to lack the focus of a purposeful study, of a plotted and planned intellectual journey. Rather they appear to this reader to be the gleanings, the tangential discoveries and epiphanies of an insatiable wanderer. Yours would seem to be a mind that never met a byway it could resist, or a cul-de-sac that might just lead to something more than an about face; perhaps a miraculous, hidden exit/entry into the unknown or the forgotten."



Well, he's a poet. He and I have covered this ground before. He once compared my brain to a vast library without a disciplined staff (see *Daybook*, p. 46)<sup>0</sup>. My response for today follows:

My dear Napier –

I take pen in hand (well, I place fingertips to keyboard) not only to further our correspondence, seeing that one of us has suggested the enterprise of a collection of letters, but also to respond to such assertion on your part that may only be seen, by the impartial and disinterested, as aspersion cast upon a faithful friend of, lo, these many years past. Clearly, electronic correspondence is no longer an ever-verdant recreational field of fair play among gentlemen. Sportsmanship has gone missing. Weeds abound. I quote:

*"Would that each human mind could be mapped, its habits and obsessions, its passions and its sloth. I would find much delight in studying your 'map'. My inclination, always, when confused or perplexed is to say 'draw me a map'."*

Ah, cartographers with their longitude, latitude, triangulation and l'esprit de géométrie, looking for the lane-end (magic *cul-de-sac*, in your message) into China. [Music up: "Colonial Man" with Hugh Masekela: *Vasco de Gama ... he is no friend of mine.*] Why China and not Wales?<sup>1</sup> Because, along with yours, I also received a message from another friend who recommended a new book by James Bradley, *The China Mirage*, both loathed for its superficiality and lauded for its insightfulness in the same Kirkus review. Bradley writes about Western misapprehensions, interpretations, policies based upon those interpretations, the propaganda that follows policy, and then, of course, wars – not that I think you, yourself, are ready to discover South Africa (home of Masekela) or to provide opium to the Chinese – or even Wales. But, the spirit of geometry takes various forms, as does l'esprit de finesse.

Neither *l'esprit de géométrie* nor *l'esprit de finesse* is entirely a curse or blessing. And, it may be the case that both tendencies can reside in the same brain (terra incognita, beyond which there be monsters), which is one reason that Blaise Pascal remains interesting to this day.

Risking oversimplification, it might be said that the geometric spirit is linear, proceeding from assumption to axiomatic system to thesis to theory to law. Something like that. It prides itself upon being logical. By contrast, the spirit of finesse is cursive, even discursive, and it casts a playful eye upon assumption, and a critical eye upon the axiomatic. Theses and theories are just that, while laws tend to be the clothes (including lab coats) that men wear.<sup>2</sup>

Risking another oversimplification, it might be said that the geometric spirit is one of narrow specialization, whereas the spirit of finesse is one of broad integration. The former is atomistic, the latter is holistic. (Please understand how objectionable I sometimes find the word 'holistic' to be. It often accompanies drivel.)

Digression. There is a paradox in the possibility of specializing in general studies. When I went up to Coxridge to take a degree in Interdisciplinary Quackery<sup>3</sup>, I faced a small dilemma insofar as I did not wish to perpetuate the focus of my studies; namely, theory. Thanks to theory, I had come to see the human world as being awash in it, and I did not wish to add a single drop more

to the great wave. Yet, I was required to write a thesis. How to avoid that under-toe? Now, there's a problem, even for someone as forgetful and duplicitous as myself.

End of digression, reference, and allusion. And yes, with considerable effort, I managed to extricate myself when I came to the realization that the purpose behind writing a thesis is not to further understanding or to increase knowledge of the world, but rather to demonstrate one's mastery of a specialized discourse within a particular discipline. To use that discourse, one must be informed in the premises of the discipline. To be informed in the premises entails the study and understanding, if not the outright acceptance, of a set of assumptions together with whatever arguments historically follow from that set. Then one adds new arguments, thereby reinforcing and/or expanding the historical arguments, all the while citing the published work of colleagues who will later cite you. It's all rather circular.

Here, in closing, while recalling Cervantes and having decided to follow his lead, I apologize for the dearth of annotation<sup>4</sup> and all failure of orderly exposition up to, and including, even date. JG



## Notes (i.e., decryption):

<sup>1</sup> Wales is the destination for an upcoming, apparently closely planned journey.

<sup>2</sup> Allusion to a poem by W.H. Auden.

<sup>3</sup> The geometric perception of the humanities. [NB. The clause should be read with a Regent's Park accent.]

<sup>4</sup> For example, see reference to 'the dearth of annotation' in the closing line, above.

<sup>5</sup> Signifying nothing, 'outside the text'. *Voilà, la dernière mutation d'un esprit complètement détraqué.*

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## Errata

<sup>0</sup> As to this reference: (see *Daybook*, p. 46)<sup>0</sup> – actually, it is page 41. Like I said, *forgetful* and *duplicitous*.

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My Swiss friend came to the house this afternoon to practice fencing (street rules, not Olympic, hence sword-fighting). When we were spent, we sat down to talk over beer. Usually, this means that I listen to whatever he has to say because, whenever I talk, he begins to yawn. Not really a problem, as I am accustomed to it. However, about four o'clock, he became very restless, then agitated, and his whole face changed until he looked haggard and much older. I asked him what the problem might be, and he responded: "It's depressing." "What is?" "The room. It's so dark."

So dark? I said: "It's natural." "Too dark," he said and bolted. Now, understand, this change happened in seconds, as the light in the room dropped owing to clouds blocking the sun. My friend rose from the table and hurried through the studio door to stand outside where it was brighter and he could breathe more easily. I followed him out. He told me of his cousin's house in Canada, with its high, small windows and darkened rooms, and compared that with the curtains in the studio. Well, the studio has no curtains, its 4' x 6' windows are four feet from the floor, and they run around the room. Also, on either side of the door, there are vertical panes that measure roughly 84" x 18". I pointed out the obvious, then said that I don't mind the setting sun or a little cloud-cover – but he wouldn't have it. In fact, he was adamantly opposed to the entire scenario of diminished light, and that surprised me. Before today, I have never seen the physical reaction of someone who cannot tolerate a half-light. Until today, I always thought he was overstating the case, whenever he complained of winters in British Columbia.

As he departed, my friend said that I should see *Gemma Bovary*. Before downloading, I watched a segment on YouTube, and my immediate response was 'shhhit' when I saw a gray-headed actor who looked vaguely like Fabrice Luchini in Rohmer's *Les nuits de la pleine lune*, which film was made 30+ years ago. Have not seen the actor in anything more recent, so I was unsure whether the bearded old fart would be who I thought he is. In the evening, I watched the film, saw the credits, and yes, it's Luchini, who looks as tired as I do. Then again, put a sword in my hand and a little boy begins to reassert himself.

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Burn the libraries. Doesn't matter whether the library is national, university, or public. Destroy the books. Poetry, history, and philosophy are the traditional targets. Records, too. No need to be Xiang Yu, Jovian, Theodosius, Cardinal Cisneros, Hitler, Pol Pot, Indira Gandhi, or Stephen Harper. Ethnicity, religious persuasion, political ideology, budgetary considerations, and orders are all incidental. We all do it: Nazis, Islamists, the Khmer Rouge, sure; but also troops of the Roman army, Crusaders, Mongolian invaders, Arab invaders, Oghuz Turks, the Parliamentary army, troops of the British army, troops of the Union army, troops of the Ottoman army, troops of the Japanese army, plainclothes cops in Sri Lanka, the IRA, bureaucrats, militant students (before exams, no doubt), Georgians, Bosnians, Romanians, Lebanese... everybody.

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### **Commonweal vs. Rights**

Not only the mindset but the terminology is weird: rainwater cannot be 'harvested' in Colorado. Owing to the drought across the Western States, the byzantine system of water law in Colorado is receiving much publicity these days. Outlaws have been making use of barrels to collect rain off the roofs of their homes. That there is theft, partner, plain and simple. Given the 'open carry' gun law, we might expect soon to see water rights enforced by vigilantes and/or sheriff's posse. Truth to tell, seein' the Water Barrel Gang themselves might be packin' Colt .45 Peacekeepers, very likely everything's gonna depend on just how parched everyone's throats get. That, or how low the water drops in their pools. Otherwise, not to worry: golf courses should be fine.

To avoid a shootout between competing interests, two solutions are likely to present themselves to politicians. Solution 1 is to legislate governmental control of the resource, which could be seen as either Socialism or Big Brother, maybe both. Solution 2 is corporate ownership of a natural resource, which would allow immutable market forces to decide allocation – perhaps in the same manner as Enron routed electricity in California. This scenario obtains after 150 years of settlers and water diversion projects in the Great American Desert.

We might hazard a guess as to what is coming – glimpse how some minds work and then extrapolate – thanks to a precedent:

In the 1970s, there was a bill in the state legislature that would have placed meters for measuring sunlight in backyards along the Front Range, if not statewide. The Public Service Company of Colorado was behind this notion. It was PSCC that wanted to charge for sunlight. Why, because at that time many people were changing to solar power, and the argument ran that someone had to pay PSCC to 'be there' as backup on cloudy days. This piece of legislation in support of one sector of the free market did not become law – but that was some forty years ago, partner, and times has changed some since way back then. These days, water, sunlight, air ... Why, shoot! They're all commodities.

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Why not? It's time for paraphrase.

Bertrand Russell:     The minority are sometimes right, the majority are always wrong.  
Mark Twain:            When you find yourself in the majority, it's time for a change.

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18 June

Nothing.

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20 June

A rational materialist will immediately balk ('end of discussion') when reading that lately I have been thinking about the differences which individuals might possess in the ratio of mental space allotted to *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*, and how those differences play out. The materialist complaint is not without foundation: the metaphorical character of language can give rise to phantoms. Also, I am unsure whether I can explain clearly the distinction between these two possible phantoms, for reason that the experiential and the experimental are often exclusive of one another. Perhaps, more precisely, we could say that experience is not always reducible to experimentation, which fact immediately bars (at least some kinds of) experience from entry into the foyer of the Rationalist Club. However, the gentleman who first proposed these two *esprits* was himself a member of the club. So then, let us begin this discussion with him.

Besides being a mathematician and a philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) is credited with inventing the first digital computer – a geared machine capable of adding and subtracting eight-digit numbers. Nonetheless, he surely would have looked queerly upon a proposition that the human mind is merely a computer, or that thinking is merely rule-governed data processing. It is reasonable to infer Pascal's rejection of the *mind-as-computer model* from the implications that follow from his distinction between *the spirit of geometry* and *the spirit of finesse*. Usually, this latter term is taken to signify *intuition* (although not in Bergson's sense of the word). And it may be unequivocally stated that, for Pascal, balanced intelligence manifests as a combination of *the spirit of geometry* and *the spirit of finesse*.

These two terms are figurative. When we say *geometry*, we do not necessarily mean the work of Euclid or Pythagoras or Archimedes or Descartes, as such. We mean something broader: a mode of thought and a methodology. In *The Spirit of Finesse* (2002), Richard Van de Lagermaat has it that "the spirit of geometry analyzes phenomena into clearly definable parts and uses deductive reason to construct a system of knowledge based on rigorous proof." By contrast, for Lagermaat, "the spirit of finesse concerns ideas and perceptions which cannot be precisely defined or broken down into parts, and uses intuitive reason to make sense of the relevant phenomena as a whole." That's one way to explain it. However, this writer intends to present yet another description of *l'esprit de finesse*. Also, we should notice that Pascals' *esprit* may be translated into English at least two ways: as *spirit*, yes; but also as *mind*. So then, we are discussing *the spirit of geometry* or the logical mind; & *the spirit of finesse* or the intuitive mind. When we are finished withal, it may be seen that, unless either mode is distorted by being pushed to an extreme, both the logical mode of thought and the intuitive mode of thought *can be* rational modes of thought. To restate, sometimes neither mode is rational.

NB. In this discussion, the words *rational* and *rationality* are used in a narrow technical sense in reference to that faculty or capacity or capability formerly understood as *common sense*, which sense, in its turn, may be taken to signify an intelligence over and above that elsewhere described as 'the brains God gave a stump'. More seriously, one reason that the terminology used in this discussion will vary (e.g., 'geometric', 'logical', 'analytical', vis-à-vis *l'esprit de géométrie*) comes with the proposition that Pascal's two modes of thought manifest themselves in different ways, including:

### **Stereotypes**

Such a dichotomy sometimes suggests stereotyped differences: for example, the often subjective intuitive mind is "subtle and supple"; by contrast, the rigorously objective geometrical mind is "plodding and inflexible" – and, like Kipling's East and West, never the twain shall meet. Pascal would disagree, and he is not alone. That the two spirits are complimentary has been indicated by Henri Poincare (1854-1912), who stated that intuition is as germane to the demonstration of a mathematical theorem as is calculation. Depending upon the type of task at hand, most of us can avail ourselves of one mode or the other. However, the extent to which we can "change modes" varies from person to person – a non-confrontational way to say that, to some greater or lesser

degree, an imbalance between the two modes exists from person to person. A further implication is that some of us might be stuck in one mode to the exclusion of the other.

Neither of the two modes is a villain. It is an imbalance between the geometric spirit and the intuitive spirit, or the incapacity to avail oneself of both, that raises issues, makes for challenges, creates difficulties, and causes problems. However, to make such a claim as this would be premature, if not presumptuous, where grounds remain for asserting that these two entities of Pascal's are merely verbal constructions.

### **Cognitive noise**

From a 21<sup>st</sup> century materialist viewpoint, mind and spirit are insubstantial phantoms. Pascal's 17<sup>th</sup> century "modes of thought" are fanciful noetic entities rather than biochemical processes. Consequently, Pascal's conception might be seen as mistaken, or delusional, or – to lift a remark of Bertrand Russell's from another context – as "a sensible one to hold at the time when it was expressed. I should be much surprised if subsequent research did not show that it needed to be modified." Apologies to Lord Russell for using his statement to critique Pascal. Nonetheless, Russell's words are in point. Meanwhile, here is Lord Russell describing a personal experience (from 1901) that might readily be ascribed to Pascal's intuitive mode:

"The ground seemed to give way beneath me and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that."

Not that we need to agree or disagree with each of Russell's propositions, or suppose that this example fully illustrates any and all manifestations of, or is a template for, the intuitive process. Clearly, Russell's experience entails considerable emotion, while Pascal's spirit of intuition need not involve emotion at all:

For example, whereas the spirit of geometry tends to construct a logical chain of the type  $A \Rightarrow B \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow D \dots$ , the spirit of intuition may manifest as a seemingly irrational leap of the type  $A \Rightarrow Z$ , with no indication, much less demonstration, of the twenty-four intervening letters until they are supplied sometime later. In this figurative or analogical case, the intuitive mode manifests as an ellipsis in which, only later, its rationality becomes apparent.

Again, the geometric and the intuitive modes are subject to interplay, and most of us can avail ourselves of either mode in accordance with the task at hand. The task may be to advance some postulate, to construct a thesis, to prove a theorem, or to state a law. In each of these endeavors, we might see the interplay. For example:

(Quoting Lagermaat) "Very often in science, the idea that grows into a testable hypothesis comes before the evidence, and the scientist then looks to the evidence to confirm her idea. However, when she comes to write up her work in a science paper, the actual process of thought is reversed so that, rather than admitting that it was the idea that led to the selection of the data, she begins with the data and implies that it was the evidence alone that led her to the conclusion."

Here, Lagermaat is not accusing the scientist of any duplicity or bad faith; rather, he is pointing out how scientific expositions are conventionally constructed. Such construction, however, tends to conceal the spirit of finesse at work.

It may even be argued that the very basis of science follows from the spirit of finesse. After all, as Pascal has shown, first principles or axioms are not subject to any proof. They are assumed to be correct, based upon experience. Axioms rest upon an intuitive understanding of the nature of things, and from these first principles the geometric spirit then proceeds to thesis to theorem to law.

Consider Newton and Einstein, and the differences between those principles which inform the former's mechanics and the latter's theory of general relativity. As Lagermaat points out, the differences between the two systems begin with a difference in interpretation of a set of facts. Einstein interpreted the facts in a new way, "and then went on to make testable predictions [on that basis]". After all, "Einstein was not in possession of any facts that were not available to physicists working in the Newtonian paradigm..."

Here, we might take it from Einstein: "Laws are only reached by non-logical methods. To make a law one has to have an intellectual love of the subject." And intuitive too, apparently, since the *method* is not-logical – which is **not** to say that it is *irrational*, but rather to suggest a mode that is not geometric. Why?

เพราะว่า ในที่สุดนั้น ใคร ๆ จะเสนอว่า Einstein เป็นคนซึ่งจะขาดสติสัมปชัญญะหรือไม่มีเหตุผล<sup>1</sup>

## **Speculation + Rant**

Here we might make an intuitive leap and suggest that an imbalance in either direction, whether weighted toward the geometric or the intuitive, can, in extreme cases, lead to irrationality. To put it directly: logic can become irrational; intuition can become irrational. Between these two, the more likely candidate for a foray into the Blue Ether Layer is the intuitive spirit. In extremis, intuition can lead to Lotto, the Flat Earth Theory, metaphysics, extra-terrestrial visitations, and bloody religious wars. This would appear to leave Mad Scientist insanity to the geometric spirit, a less than charitable view far from fairness or cricket. Nonetheless, the geometric spirit can lead to extra-terrestrial visitations, Mengelean<sup>2</sup> eugenics, and the nuclear eradication of human beings from the planet – this last scenario perhaps being no bad thing, according to Lord Russell, who, despite his shame at being human, favored disarmament together with Einstein. Bless them both.

Atomism is one manifestation of the spirit of geometry. Holism is one manifestation of the spirit of finesse, which, at an extreme, might end with no useful distinctions being made, anywhere. For example, it is one thing to question a taxonomy, but another to suppose that classification is everywhere *a priori*, and, *ipso facto*, entirely arbitrary.<sup>3</sup> Such a suggestion would be extremely irritating to an empiricist, and understandably so. Nonetheless, the possibility that irritation might become intolerance now leads me to introduce a current personal concern: the intolerance of ambiguity.<sup>4</sup> Ready? Let's see how we do...

Here's the rant:

How the intolerance of ambiguity might play out depends in large measure upon the assumptions that underlay a hypothetical syllogism ( $A \Rightarrow B \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow D$ ). A rational materialist might think that religious conviction is merely illogical superstition, but that would be only half right. It may be superstitious, but it is not *ipso facto* illogical. Jesuits and Dominicans of the Inquisition were skilled logicians. Today's Islamists are adhering to the logical consequences of their particular reading of the Koran, upon which their reasoning is founded. In the secularized Western world of fifty years ago, the possible consequences of the arms race were clarified as to outcome thanks to the cold war logic of Dr. Edward Teller's Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). More, we're not done yet with dodging that rather large bullet. Should the Islamic State acquire a nuclear weapon (one of Syria's, say), well... *on connait la chanson*<sup>5</sup>: there are *houris* waiting in heaven – not that the boys and girls in the War Rooms of the West have failed to consider a preemptive nuclear strike against ISIL. And...

And blah-blah-blah.

Now, the reason for the rant (not so very different in structure from Russell's epiphany of 1901, although the topics differ) is to indicate not only variations upon the geometric spirit *in extremis*, but to point out that such 'insanity' has an underlying intuitive component, as well. Again: both the spirit of geometry and the spirit of intuition are rational, but either mode can be distorted. Worse: where they work together, they can be abused together. Worst: there is, apparently, no other rational mode that can be brought to bear. Apparently, there's no third counter-balance.

## Illustration

By way of illustration, a single question may serve, as we turn to a particular manifestation on the assumption that even the intuitive spirit cannot always tolerate ambiguity.

Why do we burn books? We do it again and again: the new order effaces the old, as we recall the truism that 'history is written by the winners'. Power and control, then, seem to figure in the equation. Still, what does new power efface?

Of course, the destruction of libraries eliminates points of view that, considered on their merits, might lead to uncertainty, or to propositions that undermine *status quo* authority and end in civil unrest. But there is another dimension. It is recorded that, during the Muslim conquest of Egypt, Amr ibn al 'Aas ordered the burning of the library in Alexandria for reason that anything not found in the Koran had no usefulness, nor any justification to exist. But then, Julius Caesar also



torched the place, as did Aurelian, and later the Coptic Pope Theophilus (see Appendix E). The Muslims, like their illustrious predecessors, were following the logical consequences of their assumptions.

A curious disposition of *biblioclasts*, according to those who study *tomecide*, is that the book burners tend to target history, philosophy, and literature, and to preserve books on technology. It does not follow, however, that the spirit of geometry alone plays with matches or crosses over into temporary insanity.

### **What demonstration?**

If the above turn in this discussion is ill-taken, then we might turn, for a moment, in the opposite direction.

At a minimum, it should be admitted that the discussion, so far, has not proved the existence of Pascal's two modes. And if the modes are phantoms, then this discussion is about nothing. More and besides, given advances in knowledge, an ideal reader might reasonably assume that the day will soon dawn when the phenomena discussed above will be demonstrated to have an absolutely biochemical basis. That demonstration accomplished, would a biochemical explanation bring an end to Pascal's phantoms?

I doubt it. Likely, a change in terminology would ensue, and perhaps changes in the framing of questions. Likely, Pascal's *esprit de finesse* and *esprit de géométrie* would be replaced by other descriptors, yet we would still be discussing the same phenomena by other names. Why, because it is reasonable to infer, from the quoted remarks of Bertrand Russell, that *something* is at work, even if that *something* should be nothing other than the unique configuration of Russell's neural networks. The point is: it appears unlikely that intuitive experiences such as Russell's epiphany would be explained entirely satisfactorily even after everyone understands and agrees that /mind/ is absolutely a biochemical process, and /consciousness/ is a property of matter. Likely, the question would become: Why does matter give rise to immaterial phantoms like Lord Russell's epiphany? Or to experiences of *déjà-vu* and precognition? Likely, ambiguity would remain. But, ah... a simple solution presents itself for eradicating illusion and delusion: namely, the standardized configuration of engineered neural networks. The brain as GMO, with uniformity (formerly, *equality*) and inter-connectivity (formerly, *fraternity*) for all gray matter units. Forgive the tautology, but to imagine the engineering of brains requires imagination.

### **Intimations, Implications & Occam's razor**

If it has not already done so, the context of this discussion might easily proliferate beyond the usual bounds of linear explication. That is, it might bend Occam's razor. For example, *l'esprit de finesse* is never, to my knowledge, discussed in terms of *precognition*, although precognition has been described as a *finesse de perception*. Of course, a *finesse de perception* is an intuition, although not of the type that produces a rational leap ( $A \Rightarrow D$ ). From the overlap of descriptors,

it might be seen that *l'esprit de finesse* (the spirit of intuition) and precognition are related, with the latter being a manifestation of the former. But...

Have we now multiplied the number of phantoms? Here, a skeptical materialist would surely ask one of two questions: either "Is precognition possible?" or "Does precognition exist?" These are fair questions on at least two counts: 1) the absence of any personal experience of precognition on the part of the skeptic; and 2) the absence of any data except personal testimony in support of those who have experienced the phenomenon. Ah, the witness in one's own behalf. I, myself, have had four such experiences, but it would be useless to recall them here. Why, because such experience remains unsubstantiated personal testimony. Consequently, a gap remains between the experiential and the experimental, a chasm that will never be bridged so long as precognition cannot be verified through repetition under controlled conditions.

Otherwise, given a 'spirit of intuition' that manifests as precognition, look at the implications. No foresight is required to predict the questions that could arise: What of coincidence, zeitgeist, destiny and fate, or the mind-bending extrapolation that the future is sending messages back into the past? With or without the intolerance of ambiguity, a wielder of Occam's razor would likely assert that such implications are becoming unwieldy, even irrational. And, like me, you might think there are grounds for that assertion. You might also assert that, just as the experience of *déjà-vu* now has a rational explanation – a 'brain state' caused by neurochemical factors that have nothing to do with memory (*i.e.*, an actual past experience) – similarly, *precognition* will one day have a neurochemical explanation. Yet, a problem remains: When we agree that neurochemistry triggers precognition of some actual experience that is forthcoming, then we might ask whether */actual experience/* is a solipsistic neurochemical interaction – in which case, by implication, we might then wonder whether neurochemical interactions (read: physical reality) are not illusory, as well. Question: How wacky is that? Best then, for reason of utility, to put precognition aside.

### **Final Aside**

Everyone knows of Arthur C. Clark's book, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as well as Stanley Kubrick's film of it. Probably everyone also knows that the acronym HAL, letter for letter, can be moved one position forward in the Roman alphabet to read IBM. *Heavy*, man ... as we used to say circa 1970, about the time Sydney J. Harris offered this aphorism:

*"The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers."*

Doubtless, some among us might like to see fallible human judgment replaced with the rational certainty of mechanical calculation – for it appears to be an article of contemporary faith that computers cannot err, while *'to err is human'* remains a proverb.

After all, in some circles, humanity is to be overcome. That may be the future, but not for me.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rough translation of the Thai: "Because, in the end, who among us would suggest that Einstein was an irrational person or someone bereft of logic?"

<sup>2</sup> This neologism refers to Dr. Josef Mengele, who followed certain propositions to their logical conclusions. Any criticism of his work is necessarily predicated upon the truth, accuracy, or correctness of his assumptions.

<sup>3</sup> To this end, *deconstruction* has been used and abused. See *Our Present Postmodern Condition*.

<sup>4</sup> I have written about this before, in *The Village Idiot*, No. 16; and in the play, *Cathars*. The phrase 'intolerance of ambiguity' is borrowed from Dr. Robert Sapolski of Stanford University, and, as I understand it, such intolerance may have a biochemical, genetic, or epigenetic basis.

<sup>5</sup> Appendix F, for fife and drum.

**[This entry is a muddle that I recast and sent to old friends as *The Village Idiot*, No. 18 – which revision appears in Appendix G, for those interested in attempts at clarification.]**

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Just learned something of interest along genealogical lines: the Gardners and the Bunkers have intermarried over four hundred years (cousins of both names), both in England and the colonies. The Bunkers were Huguenots, and the surname was originally Boncoeur. There you have it: apparently "Gardinier" crossed the channel in 1066 (selon *Gardner-Gardiner*, a genealogy of the 1940s), and Boncoeur crossed after revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Then, on to New England and, a number of days later, Thailand.

Gardners and Bunkers also repeatedly intermarried with the Coffin, Shattuck, Sloan, Brandon, Macy, Barnard, Starbuck, and Folger families, whether in Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Boston, or elsewhere; and they (Gardners) tended to be seafaring, whether naval or commercial, well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I cannot prove it, but I suspect myself to descend from Rachel Gardner of St. Dunstan's, Stepney. On 19 April 1719, she was tried at the Old Bailey and sentenced to transportation; but, unlike other bonded passengers aboard the *Ship Margaret*, Rachel was sold as a slave in Baltimore, where her name is spelled *Rachael*. Her purchaser was Mr. Polla. Then what? About three generations later, my forbear, a rich merchant, shows up in the genealogies, but his line does not clearly connect with that of the Boston Brahmins or with those who departed New England for the Carolinas. This is why I suspect descent from a cadet branch of the family, one that broke off at Newgate Prison.

*If only* the Old Bailey had had enough foresight in 1719 to record a phylogenetic tree of Rachel's human mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) haplogroup subclade. Ah, well. Appendices C and D are what little is 'known' for now.

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There is always a trade-off. We can map the Khoisan of the Kalahari and the mensch in Munich, as technology advances and we become more like Mr. Spock. But for me, that raises a question whether I would make the trade-off – that is: would I be willing to become Mr. Spock in order to know Rachel's mtDNA?

My guess is that Spock doesn't mind being Spock, for what other reference has he? Whereas I, being a remnant from another time, possess another frame of reference. I surely would mind being Spock. I would not care to think like a computer. Why? You might explain it to yourself this way: along with the intolerance of ambiguity, there may exist the intolerance of certainty.

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I cannot help wondering whether technology – 'tricking nature', as a friend puts it – provides solutions while making new problems; not to be as recalcitrant as George Bernard Shaw, who felt that each 'advancement' led to ten new difficulties. However, if we look at California, what do we see? At this writing, the state is in drought. Well, the region remains as arid as it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; only now, thanks to development that followed from water diversion projects, the land must support a human population in excess of 38 million.

advancement ==> abundance ==> over-population ==> depletion ==> scarcity ==> ?

Shaw often made Dr. Edward Jenner's inoculation against small pox the target of his invective, not that Shaw wanted to see some little girl infected with small pox, much less die horribly from bubonic plague. Shaw's point seems to have been that a natural balance was in process of being disrupted. Today, with overpopulation, we face a Malthusian nightmare. Of course, we have petroleum-based fertilizers, irrigation, and genetically engineered foods that offset the demand for sustenance – but we have to run faster and faster to stay in the same place.

How would a 'rationalist' of Dr. Mengele's disposition approach the problem? Would he build an underground city? Would he purchase an island and design it to be self-sufficient? Would he let Malthus's calculations run their course or tinker with nature? Would Mengele look for a solution through bio-engineering – a disease, say, that affects only those with IQs below his standard – or, better yet, only those who are unemployable? Would a Mengele manufacture plastic bottles that release some free radical upon contact with water? Would he experiment with additives to foods which cause epigenetic changes in the population, perhaps increasing the incidence of infertility? What would he do?

The adaptability of human beings will provide some solution to immediate problems, no doubt. A technocrat once told me that, should our air become too polluted, technology would find a way to deal with it. In fact, we already possess the technology: we could wear goggles and gas masks whenever outdoors. No, the man was not joking.

This morning, the sky is cloudy, and here I sit, facing this stupid monitor, while recalling the uninvited guests of Andaman islanders, rugby footballers after a crash in the Andes, and Soylent

Green wafers – so yes, the mind wanders, and no wonder Plato wanted no imaginative leaps in his ideal republic. Nevertheless...

Perhaps, just before the Earth becomes an utter desert, we will escape to Mars and colonize it. In every sense, we will take our baggage with us. Perhaps our technology will make an inhabitable atmosphere, there on Mars. Time will pass, many tens of thousands of years, until one day the red planet's astronomers, physicists, and engineers train their telescopes upon the third planet in their solar system. Perhaps they will speculate about it (earlier history having been lost), and they will send space probes to ascertain whether this third planet ever produced any forms of life. Nah...

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28 June

Yesterday, I drove Janjira to a podiatry clinic in Chiang Mai. An incident occurred there, and I wish to tell you about it not only because it illustrates my disagreeable sense of humor, but also because it is an example of one way in which my mind works. I was merely playing with words and associations, and because my thoughts are no longer as fast as once they were, the incident was, for me, nearly a flashback. A surprise, at the very least. The incident happened in less than a second, so there was no malice of forethought.

As we were entering the clinic, two men were exiting. One man was Thai, in his early thirties, and he was accompanying an American, aged perhaps in his early seventies. How did I know the latter was an American? I heard him speak with a receptionist, as he paid his bill. Standing at the counter with his back turned toward me, I saw the logo printed on the backside of his tee-shirt: Cal State Univ Chico. As he exited the clinic, I excused myself and asked: "Did you teach at Chico?"

"No," he replied. "My sister taught there for many years, and she gave me this shirt. So then, tell me, are you connected with the school?"

"No, but I have a friend who taught there, and also at Davis."

"Well," he said, "I worked at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo."

"Ah," I said. "I knew a fellow who was killed returning a punt for Cal Poly. A fellow named Norm Engen."

The man thought a moment, trying to place the name. Then he said: "There was a plane crash in 1958, and the entire Cal Poly football team was killed."

"Probably a bit before my time," I replied. "Norm Engen must have died around '61 or '62."

"You know," he continued, "as tragic as that crash was, it turned out to be a boon for my department. Before the crash, there were plans to build a larger football stadium. In the end, the money was allocated to computerized graphics. Are you from California?"

"Yes, but I have been gone many, many years."

"I'm a native..." he said. "I'm from a small town north of San Francisco, up Highway 101. A town called Willits."

"I've heard of it, but I've never been there. I am from the southern part of the state, I must admit."

Voilà: the old North-South divide. He smiled and waved me off. "Southern California!" He shook his head, then continued: "Besides being the home of Seabiscuit, they say Willits is famous for two things: fruits and nuts."

"Ah. Presumably the nuts roll up from the south," I rejoined, in a fraction of a second. Now, gentle reader, just in case you have not caught what was just said, allow me to explain it. First, there is an allusion to a famous remark by Fred Allen, who once was asked why Southern California is so crazy. He replied that, owing to the rotation of the Earth, all the nuts roll to the Coast. Second, if the nuts come to Willits from elsewhere, then only the fruits are native.

While a physician examined Janjira, and after he had considered my remark for a moment, the gentleman sat down, and he and I continued talking for another quarter of an hour. Mostly, we talked about Thailand and all the rapid change. He did most of the talking, and I learned that he has been coming and going since the Vietnam War, and took up residency in 1985. When he mentioned having lived in Phuket and Bangkok before coming to Chiang Mai ten years ago, it became apparent that he and his companion were in a settled relationship rather than a rental arrangement, which was my initial impression. After all, such arrangements are not unknown, and they are common in Chiang Mai.

At one point, we discussed our shared astigmatism, and I asked about his eyeglasses. I told him that I had looked everywhere for Tojo frames – all right, Philip Johnson frames – but ended up empty-handed. He informed me that his eyeglasses did not have Tojo frames, but rather Harry Potter frames. (He was correct: Tojo frames are heavier.) So, I asked to try them on for size, and they fit fairly comfortably. He then drew a map to the shop where he had purchased them. When Janjira exited the examination room, the gentleman and I stood, shook hands, and went our different ways.

As we walked to the car, Janjira asked: "Is that man gay?"

"Yes, I think so." Then I told her everything that he and I had discussed, except the syllogism.

\*\*\*\*\*

One reason I thought to relate the above anecdote is because, this morning, I saw an article in *Libération*. Some pundit in France is now defining *homophobia* as a form of racism, and this new definition is taking off.

This is 2015 AD – the Age of Distortion. The bullshit is getting much, much too deep. The social dimension of language is collapsing in the face of fiat.

More charitably, perhaps I have one way of playing with words, while others have another.

\*\*\*\*\*

Last night, in the western sky, Neptune and Venus appeared in the missionary position, clear and bright in their striking vertical alignment. Also last night, at midnight, a second was added to the world's timepieces, the idea being to compensate or account for Earth's rotational irregularities. No wonder I feel groggy this morning. My precisely attuned bio-rhythm has been thrown off.

Have been toying with the idea of writing an essay entitled *On Flagging Enthusiasm*, but it just seems not worth the effort. Meanwhile, as we slide farther and further along into the globalized

audio-visual culture of floating signification, while making the old assumption that *Art* reflects life, the following historical progression might be seen as a reflection of the road we are on:



You may be thinking this is only a half-truth and a pessimistic distortion. Yes, admittedly, there is a more positive, life-affirming way to view our current human condition:



Not to leave you hanging, dear reader. Before we part company, here is a reproduction of a 'logo' that I once saw on the back of a young man's pre-washed (faded) denim jacket, years ago, while I was riding an old Green Bus to Chiang Rai. In fact, I saw this blazon well before 1995, the year that Internet came to the global village:

**Cannon**



SYMBOL OF MANHOOD

Voilà. By various means, one still chuckles and enjoys the time.  
And now, I thank you for your time.

## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A

My favorite collective nouns for animalia, gleaned from Wikipedia

An ascension of larks	An exaltation of larks
A bale of turtles	A fall of woodcocks
A ballet of swans	A gatling of woodpeckers
A band of gorillas	A grist of bees
A barrel of monkeys	A gulp of cormorants
A barren of mules	A harras of horses
A bask of crocodiles	A herd of wrens
A battery of barracudas	A hover of trout
A bazaar of guillemots	A husk of hares/jackrabbits
A bed of oysters	A kettle of hawks
A bloat of hippo	A labour of moles
A brace of grouse	A lamentation of swans
A building of rooks	A leap of leopards
A bury of conies	A leash of greyhounds
A business of ferrets	A mask of raccoons
A caravan of camels	A mob of emus
A cast of falcons	A murder of crows
A chain of bobolinks	A murmuration of starlings
A charm of finches	A mustering of storks
A chattering of choughs	A mutation of thrushes
A clamor of rooks	A mute of hounds
A cloud of gnats	An obstinacy of buffalo
A clowder of cats	An ostentation of peacocks
A cluster of grasshoppers	A nest of hornets
A congress of baboons	A nide of pheasants
A conspiracy of ravens	A pace of asses
A convocation of eagles	A paddling of ducks
A cover of coots	A pandemonium of parrots
A covey of quail	A parliament of owls
A crash of rhinos	A party of jays
A cry of hounds	A parcel of hogs
A deceit of lapwings	A peep of chickens
A descent of woodpeckers	A piteousness of doves
A dole of doves	A pitying of turtledoves
A down of hares	A pladge of wasps
A draught of fish	A plague of locusts
A dray of squirrels	A plump of waterfowl
A drove of cattle	A pod of walrus
A drumming of grouse	A prattle of parrots
A durante of toucans	A prickle of hedgehogs
An earth of foxes	A pride of lions

A quiver of cobras  
A rafter of turkeys  
A rag of colts  
A rhumba of rattlesnakes  
A richness of martens  
A romp of otters  
A rookery of penguins  
A rout of wolves  
A scold of jays  
A sedge of cranes  
A shiver of sharks  
A shrewdness of apes  
A siege of herons  
A singular of boars  
A skein of geese  
A sloth of bears

A smack of jellyfish  
A sneak of weasels  
A sord of mallards  
A sounder of foxes  
A squabble of seagulls  
A stand of flamingo  
A stench of skunks  
A tiding of magpies  
A totter of giraffes  
A trip of goats  
An ubiquity of sparrows  
An unkindness of ravens  
A wake of vultures  
A walk of snipe  
A warren of rabbits  
A watch of nightingales

There are many more collective nouns than these, which I like for their sound, or the image they conjure, or their humor – sometimes all three at once. For human beings, we might consider the following:

An asininity of policymakers  
A bubble of stock traders  
A canard of think tanks  
A diatribe of extremists  
An erratum of experts  
A flavor of theoretical physicists  
A greed of lawyers  
A hernia of weightlifters  
An idiocy of ideologues  
A jabberwocky of commentators  
A kink of pornographers  
A larceny of joint heirs  
A myopia of futurologists  
A nothingness of Zen practitioners  
An optimism of candidates  
A parachute of CEOs  
A quidnune of military contractors  
A racket of charismatics  
A shitload of sanitation engineers  
A tangle of explicators  
A ubiquity of strip malls  
A virtuality of postmodernists  
A wanker of press secretaries  
A xyatus of One Percenters

A yearning of reactionaries  
A zilch of nihilists

## APPENDIX B



Bidu Sayão and Heitor Villa-Lobos  
(1959)

## **APPENDIX C**

[irrelevant]

## **APPENDIX D**

[expunged]

## APPENDIX E

Partial list of burned libraries (adapted from Wikipedia)\*

<b>Library</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>
Palace and State Archives	Xianyang	206 BCE	Xiang Yu
Library of Antioch	Antioch	364 CE	Emperor Jovian
Library of the Serapeum	Alexandria	392	Theophilus
Library of Ctesiphon	Khvârvârân	651	Arab Invaders
Library of al-Hakam II	Córdoba	976	Religious scholars
Library of Rayy	Rayy	1029	Sultan Mahmud
Library of Ghazna	Ghazna	1151	'Ala ad-Din Husain
Library of Nishapur	Nishapur	1154	Oghuz Turks
Nalanda	Nalanda	1193	Bakhtiyar Khilji
Imperial Library	Constantinople	1204	The Crusaders
House of Wisdom	Baghdad	1258	Mongol Invaders
Madrassah Library	Granada	1499	Cardinal Cisneros
Bibliotheca Corviniana	Ofen	1526	Ottoman Empire.
Glasney College	Cornwall	1548	Royal officials
Mayan codices	Yucatán	1562	Diego de Landa
Raglan Library	Raglan Castle	1646	Parliamentary Army
Library of Congress	Washington	1814	British Army
University of Alabama	Tuscaloosa	1864	Union Army
Royal library	Mandalay	ca. 1885	British Army
Academy Library	Hanlin	ca. 1904	Disputed
Catholic University	Leuven	1914	German Troops
Public Records Office	Dublin	1922	Disputed.
National University	Hunan	ca. 1940	Japanese Troops
Catholic University	Leuven	1940	German Troops
National Library	Belgrade	1941	Luftwaffe
SS. Cyril & Methodius	Sofia	1943	Allied air forces
National Library	Beirut	1975	Civil War
National Library	Phnom Penh	ca. 1977	Khmer Rouge
Jaffna Public Library	Jaffna	1981	Police officers
Sikh Reference Library	Punjab	1984	Indira Gandhi
Central University Library	Bucharest	1989	Romanian Forces
Oriental Institute	Sarajevo	1992	Bosnian Serbs

<b>Library</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Perpetrator</b>
National Library	Sarajevo	1992	Bosnian Serbs
National Library	Sukhumi	1992	Georgian Forces
Public Library	Pol-i-Khomri	1998	Taliban militia
Ahmed Baba Institute	Timbuktu	2013	Islamists militia
Various libraries	Mosul	2014	ISIS
Various libraries	Anbar Province	2014	ISIS
Institute of Social Sciences	Moscow	2015	Unknown.
Central Public Library	Mosul	2015	ISIS

\*NB. Where authority issues orders without lending a helping hand, the principle is *respondeat superior*.

## APPENDIX F



## APPENDIX G



# the V iLLage iDiOT

No. 18

Published Now & Again

Since 1987?

### CAVEAT LECTOR

Published in two languages, English and American, the Id has no strict editorial policy nor any specific ideological axe to grind, hone, or polish. All points of view are welcome save those personally repugnant to our elitist, narrow-minded staff. Otherwise, the Id denies, repudiates and completely refuses to assume responsibility for the opinions expressed herein, which remain the fault and/or intellectual property of the jerks who produced them. Enough said.

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*Having Two Minds* ..... Gardner Rich

A rational materialist will immediately balk ('end of discussion') when reading that lately I have been thinking about the differences which individuals might possess in the ratio of mental space allotted to *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*, and how those differences play out. The materialist complaint is not without foundation: the metaphorical character of language can give rise to phantoms. Also, I am unsure whether I can explain clearly the distinction between these two possible phantoms, for reason that the experiential and the experimental are often exclusive of one another. Perhaps, more precisely, we could say that experience is not always amenable or reducible to experimentation, which fact immediately bars such sort of experience from entry into the foyer of the Rationalist Club. However, the gentleman who first proposed these two *esprits* was himself a member of that club. So then, let us begin this discussion with him.

Besides being a mathematician and a philosopher, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) is credited with inventing the first digital computer – a geared machine capable of adding and subtracting eight-digit numbers. Nonetheless, he surely would have looked queerly upon a proposition that the human mind is merely a computer, or that thinking is merely rule-governed data processing. It is reasonable to infer Pascal's rejection of the *mind-as-computer model* from the implications that follow from his distinction between *the spirit of geometry* and *the spirit of finesse*. Usually, this latter term is taken to signify *intuition* (although not in Bergson's sense of the word). And it



may be unequivocally stated that, for Pascal, balanced intelligence manifests as a combination of *the spirit of geometry* and *the spirit of finesse*.

These two terms are figurative. When we say *geometry*, we do not necessarily mean the work of Euclid or Pythagoras or Archimedes or Descartes, as such. We mean something broader: a mode of thought and a methodology. In *The Spirit of Finesse* (2002), Richard Van de Lagermaat has it that "the spirit of geometry analyzes phenomena into clearly definable parts and uses deductive reason to construct a system of knowledge based on rigorous proof." By contrast, for Lagermaat, "the spirit of finesse concerns ideas and perceptions which cannot be precisely defined or broken down into parts, and uses intuitive reason to make sense of the relevant phenomena as a whole." That's one way to explain it. However, this writer intends to present yet another description of *l'esprit de finesse*. Also, we should notice that Pascals' *esprit* may be translated into English at least two ways: as *spirit*, yes; but also as *mind*. So then, we are discussing *the spirit of geometry* or the logical mind; & *the spirit of finesse* or the intuitive mind. When we are finished withal, it may be seen that, unless either mode is distorted by being pushed to an extreme, both the logical mode of thought and the intuitive mode of thought *can be* rational modes of thought. To restate, sometimes neither mode is rational.

NB. In this discussion, the words *rational* and *rationality* are used in a narrow technical sense in reference to that faculty or capacity or capability formerly understood as *common sense*, which sense, in its turn, may be taken to signify an intelligence over and above that elsewhere described as 'the brains God gave a stump'. More seriously, one reason that the terminology used in this discussion will vary (e.g., 'geometric', 'logical', 'analytical', vis-à-vis *l'esprit de géométrie*) comes with the proposition that Pascal's two modes of thought manifest themselves in different ways, including:

### **Stereotypes**

Such a dichotomy sometimes suggests stereotyped differences: for example, the often subjective intuitive mind is "subtle and supple"; by contrast, the rigorously objective geometrical mind is "plodding and inflexible" – and, like Kipling's East and West, never the twain shall meet. Pascal would disagree, and he is not alone. That the two spirits are complimentary has been indicated by Henri Poincare (1854-1912), who stated that intuition is as germane to the demonstration of a mathematical theorem as is calculation. Depending upon the type of task at hand, most of us can avail ourselves of one mode or the other. However, the extent to which we can "change modes" varies from person to person – a non-confrontational way to say that, to some greater or lesser degree, an imbalance between the two modes exists from person to person. A further implication is that some of us might be stuck in one mode to the exclusion of the other.

Neither of the two modes is a villain. It is an imbalance between the geometric spirit and the intuitive spirit, or the incapacity to avail oneself of both, that raises issues, makes for challenges, creates difficulties, and causes problems. However, to make such a claim as this would be premature, if not presumptuous, where grounds remain for asserting that these two entities of Pascal's are merely verbal constructions.

## Cognitive noise

From a 21<sup>st</sup> century materialist viewpoint, mind and spirit are insubstantial phantoms. Pascal's 17<sup>th</sup> century "modes of thought" are fanciful noetic entities rather than biochemical processes. Consequently, Pascal's conception might be seen as mistaken, or delusional, or – to lift a remark of Bertrand Russell's from another context – as "a sensible one to hold at the time when it was expressed. I should be much surprised if subsequent research did not show that it needed to be modified." Apologies to Lord Russell for using his statement to critique Pascal. Nonetheless, Russell's words are in point. Meanwhile, here is Lord Russell describing a personal experience (from 1901) that might readily be ascribed to Pascal's intuitive mode:

"The ground seemed to give way beneath me and I found myself in quite another region. Within five minutes I went through such reflections as the following: the loneliness of the human soul is unendurable; nothing can penetrate it except the highest intensity of the sort of love that religious teachers have preached; whatever does not spring from this motive is harmful, or at best useless; it follows that war is wrong, that a public school education is abominable, that the use of force is to be deprecated, and that in human relations one should penetrate to the core of loneliness in each person and speak to that."

Not that we need to agree or disagree with each of Russell's propositions, or suppose that this example fully illustrates any and all manifestations of, or is a template for, the intuitive process. Clearly, Russell's experience entails considerable emotion, while Pascal's spirit of intuition need not involve emotion at all:

For example, whereas the spirit of geometry tends to construct a logical chain of the type  $A \Rightarrow B \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow D \dots$ , the spirit of intuition may manifest as a seemingly irrational leap of the type  $A \Rightarrow Z$ , with no indication, much less demonstration, of the twenty-four intervening letters until they are supplied sometime later. In this figurative or analogical case, the intuitive mode manifests as an ellipsis in which, only later, its rationality becomes apparent.

Again, the geometric and the intuitive modes are subject to interplay, and most of us can avail ourselves of either mode in accordance with the task at hand. The task may be to advance some postulate, to construct a thesis, to prove a theorem, or to state a law. In each of these endeavors, we might see the interplay. For example:

(Quoting Lagermaat) "Very often in science, the idea that grows into a testable hypothesis comes before the evidence, and the scientist then looks to the evidence to confirm her idea. However, when she comes to write up her work in a science paper, the actual process of thought is reversed so that, rather than admitting that it was the idea that led to the selection of the data, she begins with the data and implies that it was the evidence alone that led her to the conclusion."

Here, Lagermaat is not accusing the scientist of any duplicity or bad faith; rather, he is pointing out how scientific expositions are conventionally constructed. Such construction, however, tends to conceal the spirit of finesse at work.

It may even be argued that the very basis of science follows from the spirit of finesse. After all, as Pascal has shown, first principles or axioms are not subject to any proof. They are assumed to be correct, based upon experience. Axioms rest upon an intuitive understanding of the nature of things, and from these first principles the geometric spirit then proceeds to thesis to theorem to law.

Consider Newton and Einstein, and the differences between those principles which inform the former's mechanics and the latter's theory of general relativity. As Lagermaat points out, the differences between the two systems begin with a difference in interpretation of a set of facts. Einstein interpreted the facts in a new way, "and then went on to make testable predictions [on that basis]". After all, "Einstein was not in possession of any facts that were not available to physicists working in the Newtonian paradigm..."

Here, we might take it from Einstein: "Laws are only reached by non-logical methods. To make a law one has to have an intellectual love of the subject." And intuitive too, apparently, since the *method* is not-logical – which is **not** to say that it is *irrational*, but rather to suggest a mode that is not geometric. Why?

เพราะว่า ในที่สุดนั้น ใคร ๆ จะเสนอว่า Einstein เป็นคนซึ่งจะขาดสติสัมปชัญญะหรือไม่มีเหตุผล<sup>1</sup>

### **Speculation + Rant**

Here we might make an intuitive leap and suggest that an imbalance in either direction, whether weighted toward the geometric or the intuitive, can, in extreme cases, lead to irrationality. To put it directly: logic can become irrational; intuition can become irrational. Between these two, the more likely candidate for a foray into the Blue Ether Layer is the intuitive spirit. In extremis, intuition can lead to Lotto, the Flat Earth Theory, metaphysics, extra-terrestrial visitations, and bloody religious wars. This would appear to leave Mad Scientist insanity to the geometric spirit, a less than charitable view far from fairness or cricket. Nonetheless, the geometric spirit can lead to extra-terrestrial visitations, Mengelean<sup>2</sup> eugenics, and the nuclear eradication of human beings from the planet – this last scenario perhaps being no bad thing, according to Lord Russell, who, despite his shame at being human, favored disarmament together with Einstein. Bless them both: two atomists who opposed the atom bomb.

Atomism is one manifestation of the spirit of geometry. Holism is one manifestation of the spirit of finesse, which, at an extreme, might end with no useful distinctions being made, anywhere. For example, it is one thing to question a taxonomy, but another to suppose that classification is everywhere *a priori*, and, *ipso facto*, entirely arbitrary.<sup>3</sup> Such a suggestion would be irritating to an empiricist – and understandably so, because there is a plausible explanation of such visceral reactions: namely, the intolerance of ambiguity.<sup>4</sup> This, at long last, is our real concern.

See how far you can read into the following rant, before you begin to perspire:

How the intolerance of ambiguity might play out depends in large measure upon the assumptions that underlay a hypothetical syllogism ( $A \Rightarrow B \Rightarrow C \Rightarrow D$ ). A rational materialist might think that religious conviction is merely illogical superstition, but that would be only half right. It may be superstitious, yes, but it is not *ipso facto* illogical. Jesuits and Dominicans of the Inquisition were skilled logicians. Today's Islamists adhere to the logical consequences of their reading of the Koran, upon which their reasoning is founded. By analogy, in the Western world of fifty years ago, the possible consequences of the arms race were clarified as to outcome thanks to the cold war logic of Dr. Edward Teller's Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Nor are we done with dodging that rather large bullet. Should the Islamic State acquire one of Syria's nuclear weapons, well... there are *houris* waiting in heaven – not that the boys and girls in the War Rooms of the West have failed to consider a preemptive nuclear strike against ISIL...

And blah-blah-blah. Yes, the 'analogy' is a disjunction, until the leap is finally connected. Still the register is wrong, and the tone is crazed. The last sentence might be recast to sound more rational: "On two counts, it is sobering to consider the possibility of ISIL acquiring nuclear weapons: 1) a presumed willingness, given the known convictions of Islamists, to die for those convictions; and 2) the contingency scenarios, including nuclear deployment, that are considered by Western military strategists."

Now, the reason for the rant (not so very different in structure from Russell's epiphany of 1901, although the topics differ) is to attempt an 'insane' mélange – why, because both the spirit of geometry and the spirit of intuition are rational, but either mode can be distorted. Worse: where they work together, they can be abused together. Worst: there is, apparently, no other rational mode that can be brought to bear. Apparently, there's no third counter-balance.

## Illustration

By way of illustrating the intolerance of ambiguity, a single question may serve:

Why do we burn books? We do it again and again: the new order effaces the old, as we recall the oft-recited truism that 'history is written by the winners'. Power and control, then, seem to figure in the equation. Still, what does new power efface?

Of course, the destruction of libraries eliminates points of view that, considered on their merits, might lead to uncertainty, or to propositions that undermine *status quo* authority and end in civil unrest. But there is another dimension. It is recorded that, during the Muslim conquest of Egypt, Amr ibn al 'Aas ordered the burning of the library in Alexandria for reason that anything not found in the Koran had no usefulness, nor any justification to exist. But then, Julius Caesar also torched the place, as did Aurelian, and later the Coptic Pope Theophilus. The Muslims, like their illustrious predecessors, were following the logical consequences of their assumptions.

A curious disposition of *biblioclasts*, according to those who study *tomecide*, is that the book burners tend to target history, philosophy, and literature, and to preserve books on technology.

### **What demonstration?**

If the above turn in this discussion is ill-taken, then we might turn, for a moment, in the opposite direction.

At a minimum, it should be admitted that the discussion, so far, has not proved the existence of Pascal's two modes. And if the modes are phantoms, then this discussion is about nothing. More and besides, given advances in knowledge, an ideal reader might reasonably assume that the day will soon dawn when the phenomena discussed above will be demonstrated to have an absolutely biochemical basis. That demonstration accomplished, would a biochemical explanation bring an end to Pascal's phantoms?

Doubtful. Likely, a change in terminology would ensue, and perhaps changes in the framing of questions. Likely, Pascal's *esprit de finesse* and *esprit de géométrie* would be replaced by other descriptors, yet we would still be discussing the same phenomena by other names. Why, because it is reasonable to infer, from the quoted remarks of Bertrand Russell, that *something* is at work, even if that *something* should be nothing other than the unique configuration of Russell's neural networks. The point is: it appears unlikely that intuitive experiences such as Russell's epiphany would be explained entirely satisfactorily even after everyone understands and agrees that /mind/ is absolutely a biochemical process, and /consciousness/ is a property of matter. Likely, the question would become: Why does matter give rise to immaterial phantoms like Lord Russell's epiphany? Or to experiences of *déjà-vu* and precognition? Likely, ambiguity would remain. But, ah... a simple solution presents itself for eradicating illusion and delusion: namely, the standardized configuration of engineered neural networks. The brain as GMO, with uniformity (formerly, *equality*) and inter-connectivity (formerly, *fraternity*) for all gray matter units.

Forgive the tautology, but to imagine the engineering of brains requires imagination.

### **Intimations, Implications & Occam's razor**

If it has not already done so, the context of this discussion might easily proliferate beyond the usual bounds of linear explication. That is, it might bend Occam's razor. For example, *l'esprit de finesse* is never, to my knowledge, discussed in terms of *precognition*, although precognition has been described as a *finesse de perception*. Of course, a *finesse de perception* is an intuition, although not of the type that produces a rational leap ( $A \Rightarrow Z$ ). From the overlap of descriptors, it might be seen that *l'esprit de finesse* (the spirit of intuition) and precognition are related, with the latter being a manifestation of the former. But...

Have we now multiplied the number of phantoms? Here, a skeptical materialist would surely ask one of two questions: either "Is precognition possible?" or "Does precognition exist?" These are fair questions on at least two counts: 1) the absence of any personal experience of precognition

on the part of the skeptic; and 2) the absence of any data except personal testimony in support of those who have experienced the phenomenon. Ah, the witness in one's own behalf. I, myself, have had four such experiences, but it would be useless to recall them here. Why, because such experience remains unsubstantiated personal testimony. Consequently, a gap remains between the experiential and the experimental, a chasm that will never be bridged so long as precognition cannot be verified through repetition under controlled conditions.

Otherwise, given a 'spirit of intuition' that manifests as precognition, look at the implications. No foresight is required to predict the questions that could arise: What of coincidence, zeitgeist, destiny and fate, or the mind-bending extrapolation that the future is sending messages back into the past? With or without the intolerance of ambiguity, a wielder of Occam's razor would likely assert that such implications are becoming unwieldy, even irrational. And, like me, you might think there are grounds for that assertion. You might also assert that, just as the experience of *déjà-vu* now has a rational explanation – a 'brain state' caused by neurochemical factors that have nothing to do with memory (*i.e.*, an actual past experience) – similarly, *precognition* will one day have a neurochemical explanation. Yet, a problem remains: When we agree that neurochemistry triggers precognition of some actual experience that is forthcoming, then we might ask whether */actual experience/* is a solipsistic neurochemical interaction – in which case, by implication, we might then wonder whether neurochemical interactions (read: physical reality) are not illusory, as well. Question: How wacky is that? Best then, for reason of utility, to put precognition aside.

### **Final Aside**

Everyone knows of Arthur C. Clark's book, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as well as Stanley Kubrick's film of it. Probably everyone also knows that the acronym HAL, letter for letter, can be moved one position forward in the Roman alphabet to read IBM. *Heavy*, man ... as we used to say circa 1970, about the time Sydney J. Harris offered this aphorism:

*"The real danger is not that computers will begin to think like men, but that men will begin to think like computers."*

There can be little doubt which of Pascal's modes is in the ascendant, in this moment of human history, as our world becomes more technologically advanced and society becomes increasingly engineered. Doubtless, some among us might like to see fallible human judgment replaced with the rational certainty of mechanical calculation – for it appears to be an article of contemporary faith that computers cannot err, while *'to err is human'* remains a proverb.

*L'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*. For Pascal, the necessity is to keep them in balance.

\*\*\*\*\*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Rough translation of the Thai: "Because, in the end, who among us would suggest that Einstein was an irrational person or someone bereft of logic?"

<sup>2</sup> This neologism refers to Dr. Josef Mengele, who followed certain propositions to their logical conclusions. Any criticism of his work is necessarily predicated upon the truth, accuracy, or correctness of his assumptions.

<sup>3</sup> To this end, *deconstruction* has been used and abused. See: *passim*, Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> The phrase 'intolerance of ambiguity' is borrowed from Dr. Robert Sapolski (Stanford University), and it is thought to have a biochemical basis. See: *The Village Idiot*, No. 16.

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(as a concept)